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Performing the Mistress
The Emergence of the Modern Mistress on the Early Modern Stage

Brooks, Victoria

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**Performing the Mistress: The Emergence of the Modern
Mistress on the Early Modern Stage**

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Victoria Brooks
King's College London
2018

Abstract

This thesis explores the presentation of women in extra-marital relationships on the early modern stage, demonstrating how this modern understanding of the 'mistress' emerged performatively while its definition was still evolving. I will examine how playwrights utilise narratives of sexual coercion to represent how the chaste mistress of courtly love literature is sexualised before exploring dramatic representations of the ruler's mistress. I argue that playwrights represent this 'modern mistress' by emphasising how her illegitimacy allows her to usurp the prerogatives and masculinity of male characters. The third chapter will be a case study of Anne Boleyn on the early modern stage, demonstrating how dramatists utilised a strategy of evasion to represent this personage which allowed them to produce a more nuanced portrayal. Finally, an exploration of women on trial reveals how dramatists exploit the possibilities of theatre to allow female characters who engaged in sexual relationships to argue against erroneous efforts to categorise them, demonstrating the inadequacy of pre-existing categories of womanhood and their ideological misuse by men. These trial scenes allow playwrights to demonstrate the significance of performance and how the theatrical arena allows for female characters to resist incorrect terminology that may be applied to them. The theatre therefore produced characters who occupy the social and cultural space of the 'modern mistress', creating a new category of womanhood in early modern drama.

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INTRODUCTION

‘[T]hose women, whom the Kings were to take for their Wives, and not for Mistresses, [...] which is but a later name for Concubines’.¹ John Donne’s sermon raises the question: did early modern writers consider the term ‘mistress’ to be synonymous with ‘concubine’? Was there no distinction? Moreover, what about related titles attributed to unmarried, sexually-active women in early modern England? Donne’s statement in fact provides a fitting example of the complexity involved in defining women’s sexual immorality in the early modern period, underlining the way definitions were changing rapidly in the period and inspiring my research into what exactly constitutes a ‘mistress’ in the sixteenth and seventeenth century.

Today we understand ‘mistress’ to mean ‘[a] woman other than his wife with whom a man has a long-lasting sexual relationship’.² Throughout this thesis I will utilise the phrase ‘modern’ or ‘sexual mistress’ to denote this understanding of the term. However, this was not the prevailing understanding during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. This thesis will argue that the early modern theatre negotiated its way towards a shared understanding of a woman in an extra-marital relationship who is other than a whore, courtesan or concubine. It is my contention that whether or not they used the term ‘mistress’ in the modern sense – the word was acquiring its modern meaning across the period in question, and the theatres contributed to that change – the playwrights repeatedly represent

¹John Donne, *LXXX sermons* (London: 1640), p. 642/ Iii5 v.

² ‘Mistress’, *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <<http://www.oed.com>> [accessed 3 March 2012].

Subsequent references to this resource will be abbreviated to *OED*.

women who occupy the social or cultural space of the ‘modern mistress’ and in so doing they in effect *created the ‘mistress’* performatively. In other words, it is through the theatre that the modern meaning of ‘mistress’ emerged in the English cultural lexicon.

In this introduction I will address the meanings of ‘mistress’ as recorded in the *OED* and its usage in this period. I will demonstrate firstly that its prevailing meaning during the medieval era was in the context of courtly love; it then acquired ironic or euphemistic properties that undermined the supposed purity of this meaning, thus revealing how the term evolved to include the sexual dimension that characterises the ‘modern mistress’. The following section will illustrate how non-dramatic literature experimented with the meanings of ‘mistress’ while showing that the *OED*’s first recorded uses of the ‘modern mistress’ are incorrect. As I describe how the term became sexualised in early modern writings, I will address and dismiss Donne and others’ claims that ‘mistress’ was merely another term for ‘whore’, ‘courtesan’ or ‘concubine’. The next section will focus on the use of ‘mistress’ onstage, revealing how the word ‘mistress’ in both its courtly and modern incarnations was employed by playwrights. Consequently, frequent efforts are made to clarify which type of mistress is meant. The meaning of ‘mistress’ is thus shown to be unstable but increasingly seems to incorporate the sexual implication: dramatists are actively engaged in this transformation through their portrayal of female characters involved in extra-marital sexual relationships. I will then provide a survey of criticism addressing the representation of women and the cultural construction of gender in the period which provides the current context for my analysis, before outlining the structure of my thesis.

As this thesis provides a drama-centred alternative to the *OED*, it is worth analysing the plurality of meanings that ‘mistress’ encompassed between 1555-1642. ‘Mistress’ has evolved and altered considerably since its first recorded use in approximately 1330: ‘To hir maistresse sche gan say that hye was boun to go / To the kight ther he lay’. This usage is cited under the first definition offered by the *OED*: ‘1. A woman having control or authority’. Similarly neutral or positive definitions following the woman in power motif predominated until the early fifteenth century, during which ‘mistress’ acquired romantic connotations: ‘5. a. A woman loved and courted by a man; a female sweetheart’. This definition is familiar to many medieval and early modern scholars of courtly love, but its current obsolescence is due to potential confusion with ‘7. Woman other than his wife with whom a man has a long-lasting sexual relationship’. In the context of male-female relationships, it is the fifth and seventh meanings which dominated the early modern lexicon and it is these two usages that could cause potential confusion.

It is necessary to address the frequent confusion of the two types of mistresses described in section five and seven of the *OED*’s definition because, I argue, the dictionary itself confuses the two. One of the first usages of ‘mistress’ denoting an extra-marital sexual partner, according to the *OED*, can be attributed to Robert Johnson’s translation of Giovanni Botero’s *Relations Famous Kingdoms World*: ‘Euery man hath his Mistris, with Instruments of Musicke, and such like pleasures’. However, I contend that this passage could easily refer to a ‘courtly mistress’ as the man does not express sexual intentions and there is no evidence of reciprocity in the relationship; this could just describe a man attempting to woo an unattainable lady with the traditional courtly pastime of

music. As even this venerable resource may be confused by these two different understandings of ‘mistress’, it is worth examining what exactly the ‘courtly mistress’ meant to the early modern public.

1. The Courtly Mistress

Geoffrey Chaucer used ‘mistress’ as early as 1375 in *Anelida and Arcite*: ‘Me, that ye calden your maistresse, /Your sovereyne lady in this world here’.³ The use of ‘sovereyne lady’ indicates that the man considers his ‘maistresse’ to be superior to himself and in control of his destiny. Such elevation of the desired ‘mistress’ above her subjugated lover typically occurred in courtly love literature, ranging from medieval romances to early modern poetry. ‘Courtly love’ denotes a literary movement traced back to the troubadours of Provence, and subsequently spread throughout northern Europe via the patronage of Eleanor of Aquitaine and her children. Despite the seeming clarity of the title, the form in which ‘courtly love’ manifests itself in medieval and early modern literature varies considerably, ranging from the platonic worship of an unattainable mistress to an adulterous passion that is nevertheless ennobling.⁴ Andreas Capellanus produced the treatise *The Art of Courtly Love* which acted as a tongue-in-cheek guide for courtly lovers, claiming that ‘love [...] makes a man shine with so many virtues and

³ Geoffrey Chaucer, *Anelida and Arcite*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 375-394 (p. 379).

⁴ ‘Courtly Love’, *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan (Princeton University Press, 1993), xlvi, 1383.

teaches everyone [...] so many good traits of character'.⁵ His notion that '[m]arriage is no real excuse for not loving' (p. 184) finds fulfilment in Chretien de Troyes's *Lancelot*, in which the focus is the adulterous yet ennobling passion between Lancelot and Guinevere. The concept of Platonic love and its spiritual benefits was developed by Marsilio Ficino's *De Amore*: 'Love is what unites us most closely to God'. He observes that 'physical beauty' inspires '[t]rue love [which] is nothing but a particular effort to fly to divine beauty'. Other medieval romances featured similar tales that embodied courtly love, notably the *Le Roman de la Rose* and *Le Morte D'Arthur*. The latter includes this speech in which 'love' is personified as one mistress while Lancelot alludes to his own: 'love is a great mistress. And if my lady were here as she nis not [...] ye should not bear away the worship'.⁶ Although the 'mistress' need not be chaste, for the most part she is considered superior to her lover, frequently idealized as a conduit to the ennoblement (spiritual or otherwise) of the lover and requiring 'homage and reuerence, wherwithal louers o|bey and (in a maner) woorship the vertue of the women beloued'⁷ – it is this practice of deifying women which received some

⁵ Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. by John Jay Parry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), p. 31.

⁶ Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte D'Arthur Volume II*, ed. by Janet Cowen (London: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 149.

⁷ Baldassare Castiglione, *The courtyer of Count Baldessar Castilio*, trans. by Thomas Hoby (1562), li.iii v.

criticism from humanists during the Renaissance, obscuring as it does the reality of the 'social being' actually in existence.⁸

During the sixteenth century, the works of Petrarch 'revitalized' 'the themes and imagery of' courtly love (Preminger and Brogan), such as burning desire and the lover's 'inborn suffering' (Capellanus, p. 28). Chaucer interrupts *Troilus and Criseyde* with a direct homage to Petrarch's 'S'amor non è': Petrarch writes '[i]f good, how chance [Love] hurtes so many men?' (l. 3),⁹ which the *Canticus Troili* transforms into '[i]f love be good, from whennes cometh my woo?' (l. 402).¹⁰

Samuel Daniel, meanwhile, references Petrarch's poetical mistress 'Laura' in his own sonnet when he declares 'Though thou a *Laura* hast no *Petrarch* found'.¹¹

Unsurprisingly, 'literature in which men are enjoined to subordinate themselves to women' found particular relevance during the reign of Elizabeth I, the unattainable mistress of many a courtier.¹² The sonnet tradition in early modern England made repeated reference to the unattainable mistress: 'But for to love (lo) such a sterne

⁸ Juliet Dusinberre, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, 3rd edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1975), p. 6.

⁹ Francesco Petrarca, *Petrarch in English*, ed. and trans. by Thomas P. Roche (London: Penguin Books, 2005), p. 128.

¹⁰ Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 471-585 (p. 478).

¹¹ Samuel Daniel, 'Sonnet. XXXVIII', in *Delia and Rosamond augmented Cleopatra* (London: 1594) D4^v.

¹² James A. Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 173.

maistresse, / Where cruelty dwelles, alas it were in vain'.¹³ In some poetry there is a convergence of the courtly love ethos with Neoplatonic ideas which developed the notion of spiritual ennoblement through the process of loving an unattainable mistress. Other writers rejected Petrarchan conventions, such as Donne who declares 'let me not serve so'.¹⁴ They are keen to 'attack Petrarchan idealization' in favour of sexual realism.¹⁵

The potential for variety in courtly love literature, however, does not obscure the fact that the 'mistress' in such work is not the focal point of the writer: the 'desiring subject' is.¹⁶ Ficino and other Platonists perceived love as the medium through which one achieves communion with the divine, '[rendering] love an internal process for the subject, ultimately separable from its original context of a materially present other'.¹⁷ As long as there is 'an idealized and inaccessible object [mistress]', the Petrarchan speaker can '[construct] a subjective poetic persona' with 'the roles of subjective self and objectified other gendered male and female, respectively' (Selleck, p. 91). The mistress must therefore submit to the

¹³ *Tottel's Miscellany: Songs and Sonnets of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, Sir Thomas Wyatt and Others*, ed. by Amanda Holton and Tom Macfaul (London: Penguin Classics, 2011), p. 79.

¹⁴ John Donne, 'Elegy 9', in *John Donne: The Major Works*, ed. by John Carey (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 54.

¹⁵ Heather Dubrow, *Echoes of Desire: English Petrarchism and Its Counterdiscourses* (London: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 273.

¹⁶ Natasha Distiller, *Desire and Gender in the Sonnet Tradition* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 30.

¹⁷ Nancy Selleck, *The Interpersonal Idiom in Shakespeare, Donne, and Early Modern Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 97.

representational control of the desiring subject.¹⁸ She is a woman without her own voice, and I agree with Philippa Berry's assessment regarding the essential passivity of this breed of mistress, about whom there was an 'anxiety that the beloved's passive power might suddenly seek active expression, in an assertion of her own feelings and desires which threatened to escape the rhetorical and imaginative control of the male lover'.¹⁹ This literary concern finds its reflection in the epistemological anxiety regarding the early modern woman's sexual categorisation.

The use of 'mistress' in its courtly incarnation continued throughout the early modern period on stage. For instance, a character in *Every Man Out of His Humour* (1600) declares 'I'll be bold to mix the health of your divine mistress' (V.3.62),²⁰ while a woman in *The Deserving Favourite* (1629) announces 'I see I must allow you the Louers Phrases, / Which is to call their Mistris St.' (I.1).²¹ The imagery of worship and idolatry both conform perfectly to the courtly love literary tradition. At the same time, however, dramatists employed the term euphemistically or ironically which undermined the supposed ennobling purity of the 'courtly mistress'. Edward Sharpham has a character observe 'If you match

¹⁸ Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity: Sexual Jealousy in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.134.

¹⁹ Philippa Berry, *Of Chastity and Power: Elizabethan Literature and the Unmarried Queen* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 4.

²⁰ Ben Jonson, *Every Man Out of His Humour*, ed. by Helen Ostovich, *The Revels Plays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

²¹ Lodowicke Carlell, *The deserving favourite* (London: 1629), C3^r.

with a Courtier, heele haue a dozen mistresses at least' (I.1),²² while *The Woman-Hater*'s Gondarino comments on 'how familiar a thing is it with the Poets of our age, to extoll their whores, which they call mistresses, with heauenly praises' (IV.1).²³ The latter certainly perceives 'mistress' to be a euphemism for whore. *The Shepherd's Holy-Day* (1635) expands on Sharpham's cynicism:

They live a heavenly life of love in Court,
To that which we do here; a Mistresse there
Will satisfie the longings of her lover,
And never trouble *Hymen* for the matter (V.2).²⁴

One can infer that this ostensibly 'courtly mistress' satisfies sexual 'longings' without requiring the blessing of a marriage.

What is revealed in such exchanges is the tendency of characters to utilise the term 'mistress' in its courtly sense ironically or euphemistically. The use of 'mistress' as a euphemism indicates that sexuality had infiltrated the early modern understanding of the word, and consequently its usage evolved to incorporate sex in a manner that anticipates the modern meaning of 'mistress'. It is worth contextualising the creation of the 'modern mistress' on stage with the experimentation that occurred in non-dramatic literature during this period. I will therefore explore early modern usages of 'mistress' in such works and establish when the 'sexual mistress' began to emerge in literature.

²² Edward Sharpham, *Cupid's whirligig* (London: 1607), C2^v.

²³ Francis Beaumont, *The vvoman hater* (London: 1607), F4^r.

²⁴ J. R., *The shepherd's holy-day* (London: 1635), G1^r.

2. The Modern Mistress in Non-Dramatic Literature

From the fourteenth century onwards, ‘mistress’ was used to denote a wife or a woman in a position of authority – the feminine form of ‘master’ – as it is used in Juan Luis Vives’s treatise advising the ‘master’ to keep an eye on the ‘mistress’ in the matrimonial household.²⁵ It could also suggest a woman of high social status, specifically in connection to court, as indicated in John Baret’s *Triple Dictionary*: ‘a Ladie or maistris [...] [a] ladie of the court’.²⁶ Such usage continued into the seventeenth century, as when Joseph Swetnam describes a wealthy wife as perilous because one ‘shalt find her a commanding Mistresse’; he thus exploits the authority inherent in definitions of ‘mistress’ to enhance his misogynistic arraignment of women who do not know their place – a category to which the ‘sexual mistress’ belongs.²⁷ This demonstrates that despite the evolution and flexibility of the term ‘mistress’ during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it contained within it the earlier nuances of authority or social superiority. Such superiority is also evident in understandings of the ‘courtly mistress’, before whom the lover frequently abases himself. When approaching the potential sexual or courtly qualities of the ‘mistress’, however, matters can become complicated. For instance, Jean de Serres references both the authoritative matrimonial mistress (see Vives) and the sexual mistress in his text: ‘whilest they desire [...] to shunne one mistresse, they pull ouer their heads many

²⁵ Juan Luis Vives, *The office and duetie of an husband* (London: 1555), fol. 201^v.

²⁶ John Baret, *An aluearie or triple dictionarie* (London: 1574), Mm2^r.

²⁷ Joseph Swetnam, *The arraignment of leuud, idel, froward, and vnconstant women* (London: 1615), H3^v.

mistresses, that is to saye, proud and faithlesse harlots.’²⁸ ‘Mistress’ is used here to denote both an unwanted wife and a harlot, a judgemental synonym for ‘whore’. The writer establishes at least two incarnations of ‘mistress’ in the early modern imagination: by using ‘mistress’ to denote a man’s unwanted ‘wife’, the writer expects the reader to recognise the old understanding of the term as a woman with authority – in this case, presumably over her husband’s (sexual) freedom; by utilising ‘mistresses’ to signify multiple sexual partners contemptuously, the writer encourages the reader to understand that the term can be applied to women who engage in sexual relationships outside of marriage. This continued flexibility requires me to seek the earliest use of ‘mistress’ in an unambiguously sexual context in English literature.

Sermons and religious texts like de Serres’s tend to conflate courtly mistresses with whores or any sexually-active woman: for moralists, any relationship occurring outside of marriage is fundamentally unchaste. Even if there is no sexual or improper contact between the courtly mistress and her lover, it is assumed in several writings that the intention of such a relationship or its eventual result is unchastity. The spiritual text *The Temporysour* (1555) warns the English that their sins will incur punishment including the transformation of ‘the cherished beautye of thy La| dyes and dayntie Mistresses into withered|nes’.²⁹ Despite the recitation of sin in this passage, there is no reason to suspect that the mistresses here are anything other than the courtly kind, coupled as they are with ‘Ladies’ and images of opulent wealth. Nonetheless, the apparently chaste

²⁸ Jean de Serres, *A godlie and learned commentarie vpon the excellent book of Solomon*, trans. by John Stockwood (London: 1585), p. 224.

²⁹ Wolfgang Musculus, *The temporysour*, trans. by R.P (1555), fol. 4^v.

relationship between a courtly mistress and her lover is located within a passage deriding the sins of mankind, with Musculus evincing little nuance in understanding the variety of extra-marital relationships and simply deeming them all divinely unsanctioned.

In the religious text *Two fruitfull exercises*, the writer alludes to the potential unchastity of an apparently courtly mistress: ‘wearing their mistres haire for a fauor in their hats [...] as a publike te|stimonie of the impudent incontinencie of the one, and incontinent impudencie of the other’.³⁰ This demonstrates the potential conflation of the sexual mistress and the courtly in religious or moral tracts. By the seventeenth century the definition of ‘mistress’ has evolved, as evidenced by William Whately’s religious analogy comparing the world to a mistress and heaven to a wife:

The worldly man is so taken vp in courting and wooing his har|lotry mistresse, the world [...] the scripture cals the worldling an adulterer, because as the whoremaister leaues a beautifull and wel-conditioned wife, to embrace a common and polluted curtizan, so doth hee aban|don God and saluation.³¹

Unlike de Serres, Whately does not need to declare that ‘mistresses’ are ‘harlots’ and sinful alternatives to wives explicitly; instead, he expects his reader to recognize a specific breed of ‘mistress’ as lascivious and corrupting – a negative perception of the ‘sexual mistress’. The use of ‘harlotry’ here is revealing as the term is often judgemental, referring to obscene behaviour or words as well as sexual misdeeds and excess. As Martin Ingram notes, earlier ‘harlot’ had [...]

³⁰ E. R., *Two fruitfull exercises the one* (London: 1588), B4^r.

³¹ William Whately, *A caveat for the couetous* (London: 1609), p. 383.

been used not only of women but also of men [...] whether in a sexual or a non-sexual sense'; over the years, however, its meaning shifted so that 'in Bridewell by 1560 it referred solely to sexually transgressive women'.³² Whately thus clarifies that his understanding of 'mistress' includes not just a sexual dimension but also an accompanying immoderation and immorality. He signifies that this type of 'mistress' lacks self-control, specifically sexually, unlike the 'courtly mistress' or the 'mistress of the household'; this accords with his allusions to her as 'common' and a 'whore' as the 'whore' was understood to be sexually indiscriminate or 'common'. His subsequent use of 'curtizan', which I will argue is not synonymous with either 'whore' or 'mistress' but is used so here, further clarifies his view of a moral dichotomy in female sexual behaviour: marital sex is moral, extra-marital sex is immoral, and there is no need for further clarity in the types of women engaged in this behaviour.

The courtly mistress maintained a strong hold on the imagination in works designed to entertain rather than proselytize. Raoul Lefèvre's tale of Jupiter's successful seduction of Danaë begins with the standard rhetoric of the courtly lover seeking the favour of his disinterested mistress: 'ffor ye ar my lady and my only maystresse whiche haue maistred myn herte'.³³ This type of mistress recurs in sixteenth century works after being revitalized by popular Petrarchan poetry: 'But for to love, lo, such a stern mistress, / Where cruelty dwells, alas, it were in

³² Martin Ingram, *Carnal Knowledge: Regulating Sex in England, 1470-1600*, Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 366.

³³ Raoul Lefèvre, *The recuyell of the historyes of Troye* (Bruges: 1473), fol. 59v.

vain'.³⁴ Thomas Wyatt's mistress patently conforms to Petrarchan conventions in her aloofness and cruelty.

From the mid-sixteenth century, however, a specifically sexual and extra-marital element began to permeate the usage of the term 'mistress', and there is evidence that writers were interpreting the 'mistress' as a conflation of a beloved with a (potential) sexual partner. This was not always immediately apparent, and an examination of the context is necessary to comprehend the sexual nuances of the early modern mistress rather than the purely courtly iteration that had dominated previously. The satiric *The Image of Idlenesse* (1555) mocks women and the men who seek them, with Bawdin Bachelor claiming that he would perform better as a warrior if he were attempting to impress a mistress: 'Or to expresse more lyuely, well nere as greate an increase of holde and forward harte, couetynghe hyghe enterpryse, to obteyne honest estimation and fauour at his mystres hands, as drery wed locke appalynghe the lyuely spirites prouoketh cowardry.'³⁵ Initially, this letter seems to resemble a courtly relationship, especially Bawdin's belief that seeking his mistress's favour will inspire him to greater martial feats. However, this military setting and ironic tone is not one conducive to the civilised courtly romance; consequently, one is encouraged to perceive the relationship Bawdin desires as sexual in nature rather than idealized. This interpretation is supported by his repeated derogation of marriage and the

³⁴ Thomas Wyatt, 'Complaint for True Love Unrequited', in *The Poetical Works of Surrey and Wyatt*, by Henry Howard Earl of Surrey and Sir Thomas Wyatt, 2 vols (London: William Pickering, 1831), II, pp. 22-3 (p. 23).

³⁵ Oliver Oldwanton, *A lyttle treatyse called the image of idlenesse* (London: 1555), D3v.

contrast he draws between a wife and a mistress: 'I haue sometime knowen wedded men in warlike affayres do right boldely and well, but that hath byn by waye of desperation, chosynge rather to dye, yf Fortune wolde ascent, then longer to liue vnder such yoke of seruytude'. This juxtaposition of 'wife' and 'mistress' presents them as opposites, or antagonists, suggesting an illicit facet to one's relationship with a mistress – an extramarital dimension.

The 'mistress' reappears when Bawdin recommends discretion in men's relationships with a mistress, relating an anecdote about a woman so overcome with 'affection' that she 'kyst the paryshe Clarke' (her lover) before the entire parish. Bawdin advises any would-be lovers to 'take hede that ye do not in lykewyse, & when ye list to reward your mystres with some iewel or garment, loke ye make no gyft therof, bur lese it vnto her vpon some wager, made in the husbandes presence'. The physical familiarity evident in the anecdote and the secrecy advocated in general points to an association of the term 'mistress' with the notion of a specifically sexual relationship, one that is extramarital and ideally unnoticed by the woman's spouse. Bawdin later includes the caveat that he does not intend to entice anyone to bad behaviour, but if one were already so inclined then he merely means to offer advice with which rumour might be lessened. The need for this disclaimer indicates that those who should heed his advice are offending traditional morality; given the semi-sanctioned nature of a courtly relationship, the behaviour to which Bawdin alludes is socially undesirable.

By conflating the 'beloved' with a (potential) sexual partner, early modern writers emphasise a reciprocal facet to the relationship between man and mistress that differentiates it from merely a 'courtly' one. Thomas Blenerhasset (1578) has

Uther Pendragon describe his desire to ‘sit vpon’ the knee of his ‘Mistresse’.³⁶ There is no explicit mention of carnal relations, but the physical intimacy of sitting upon someone’s knee suggests a less than decorous relationship; furthermore, the text is framed as Uther’s lament over his political failings to which the ennobling ‘courtly mistress’ would not belong but a ‘sexual mistress’ who evokes his lust would. This interpretation is supported by the surrounding references to Roman harlots and Uther’s ‘pleasure plaste’. A poem in *Tragicall Tales* (1587) is titled ‘To his mistres, declaring his life only to depend on her looks’, in which the speaker refers to himself as his mistress’s servant whose life can be saved by her looks – thus entirely obedient to the conventions of courtly love and Petrarchan poetry.³⁷ Yet the work also features an account of Hero and Leander where the mistress is characterised differently: ‘He neuer went but did enioy, / his mistres whom he did desire’. This mistress is certainly sexual, demonstrating the continued validity of a variety of definitions.

In 1592 Robert Greene relates the tale of an unambiguously adulterous affair between a wife and her husband’s friend:

loth Gentlemen should die for loue, after a few excuses [...] him dub her husband knight of the forked order, and so to satisfie his humor, made for feyt of her owne honor. Thus these two louers conti|nued by a great space in such plesures as vnchast wantons count their felicitie.³⁸

³⁶ Thomas Blenerhasset, *The seconde part of the Mirrour for magistrates* (London: 1578), J2^v.

³⁷ George Turberville, *Tragicall tales* (London: 1587), fol. 150^v.

³⁸ Robert Greene, *A disputation* (London: 1592), E3^r.

The cynical Greene manipulates the language of courtly literature to great subversive effect here: the wife is seduced into infidelity by the standard convention of a courtly lover dying of love and beseeching his ‘mistress’ for relief, while the chivalrous knight is displaced by the husband knighted as a cuckold. She is moved to repentance after her husband secretly discovers the affair and begins leaving counterfeit money out every time he sleeps with his wife, eventually acknowledging that he did so because he can no longer treat her as a wife but a whore. Shamed, she persuades her lover to renounce their relationship: ‘The gentleman astonied at this straunge Metamorphosis of his mistresse, sat a good while in a maze’ (F1 r). The word ‘mistress’ appears frequently in this text, but it is primarily used to denote the ‘mistress of the household’, the servant’s superior; only toward the end is it explicitly sexualised. This later use of ‘mistress’ unambiguously denotes an extra-marital sexual partner, yet this clarity is undermined by the title that identifies the wife as a ‘courtizen’. Such conflations recurred during the turn of the century while Donne (a cleric) and Lewis Bayly (a bishop) continued this tradition some years later: ‘adorning *vi/ces* with the names of *Ver/tues*: as to call [...] *Whore/dome*, louing a *Mistresse*’.³⁹ However, these pious and censorious evaluations are challenged in *The Estates, Empires, & Principallities of the World* (1615) when the writer refrains from conflating the mistress with other terms denoting sexual immorality such a ‘whore’ and also abandons any suggestion that she was ‘courtly’: ‘The women of this countrie [Lithuania] haue friends by their husbands sufferance and leaue, whom they enioy in their sports of loue when they please, and yet if a

³⁹ Lewis Bayly, *The practise of pietie* (London: 1613), p. 253.

married man had a Mistris, he should be blamed'.⁴⁰ The patent disagreement between the writers as to what exactly a mistress was demonstrates again that the definition of this term remained in flux at this time.

This analysis demonstrates the evolution of the early modern understanding of 'mistress', revealing how the term was increasingly utilised to reference a sexual relationship – much as a modern reader employs the word. My research into courtly love led me to the conclusion that what differentiates the 'courtly' mistress from the subject of my research is the former's fundamental passivity, not whether or not she is the sexual partner of a man. The mistress of courtly love or Petrarchan poetry possesses a false power expressed through her resistance (or distance) from the lover, but as Aldo Scaglione observes, the lover is infatuated 'with desire itself' – infatuated with the act of desiring rather than obtaining his desire or for the expression of reciprocity from his object of desire.⁴¹ The 'mistress' of courtly love will be worshipped and/or desired come what may; the mistress who becomes a sexual partner must agree to a man's advances or submit to them. Nevertheless, there was continued resistance to this modern understanding of 'mistress' in the seventeenth century. We have seen that in Donne's sermon when he attempts to erase the modern meaning of 'mistress' out of existence before it has even taken firm root in the lexicon, declaring it to be simply a synonym for 'concubine'. This was not a unique endeavour, as many attempted to conflate the 'sexual mistress' with other titles that denoted women

⁴⁰ Pierre d' Avity, *The estates, empires, & principalities of the world*, trans. by Edward Grimstone (London: 1615), p. 635/ Hhh6^r.

⁴¹ Aldo Scaglione, 'Petrarchan Love and the Pleasures of Frustration', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 58 (1997) pp. 557-572 (p. 558).

engaged in sexual relationships outside the confines of marriage. Such conflation is simplistic, as I will demonstrate below.

3. Mistress or Concubine, Courtesan, Whore

Competing with the idealised courtly 'beloved' in the early modern imagination, words such as 'whore', courtesan' and 'concubine' also haunted the term 'mistress'. Donne claimed 'mistress' to be a newer word for 'concubine' while 'courtesan' was also used interchangeably with 'mistress', as evidenced by *A vvomans vvoorth* (1599) in which a young man's 'Mistresse & lo | uer' is subsequently addressed as 'worthy courtezane'.⁴² Alexandre de Pontaymeri often wrote in defence of women but even he could not disregard the patriarchal tendency to conflate woman engaged in diverse sexual relationships. Thomas Floyd (1600) did the same in his work lamenting the unchaste behaviour of rulers like 'Alexander [who] had a curtisan, whose fauour hee wore, as a signe of the deuotio~ he bare to this his mistres'; he thus perceives women engaged in extra-marrital sex as interchangeable.⁴³ Nevertheless, the most popular epithet applied to sexually-unconventional women was undoubtedly 'whore', and the essayist William Cornwallis argues that 'courting' a mistress was comparable to 'buying' a whore, for 'the end of both is Luxury'; the principal difference is that one may speak 'more finely' yet 'they both meane plainly'.⁴⁴ Interestingly, this appeared the same year as Floyd's work, but such debates about terminology were not limited to the turn of the century; in 1628 the Puritan polemicist William Prynne

⁴² Alexandre de Pontaymeri, *A vvomans vvoorth* (London: 1599), p. 39/ E3^r.

⁴³ Thomas Floyd, *The picture of a perfit common wealth* (1600), p. 169-70/ I^r-I2^v.

⁴⁴ William Cornwallis, *Essayes* (London: 1600-1), M7^v.

decried the practice of ‘foster[ing] Loue-locke[s]’ for ‘the commemoration of some Mistresse, Whore, or Sweet-heart, (as they stile them)’, unsurprisingly repulsed by any form of unchastity.⁴⁵

The apparent need for such writers to define what a mistress was reveals the continuing fluctuation of the term’s meaning during this period, and such competing efforts to claim that it is merely a euphemism for other unflattering social designations undermine each other and remain unconvincing. Nonetheless, it is worth considering what the early modern public understood by the terms ‘whore’, ‘courtesan’, and ‘concubine’, as I can then demonstrate how a ‘sexual mistress’ differs from these other sexual and social groupings. Ruth Mazo Karras and Sydney Houston-Goudge have shown that the designation ‘whore’ is one of considerable semantic complexity.⁴⁶ A *Christian dictionarie* defines it as ‘[a]n vnchast woman, taking money for the vse of her body’, obviously a moral interpretation but one that accurately shows how the term has its foundation in conceptions of sexual immorality as well as of commercial sex.⁴⁷ Today the commercial transactions indicative of prostitution are ideologically distinct from subjective evaluations of personal promiscuity, but medieval and early modern literature demonstrates no such distinction. The word ‘prostitute’ in its modern application (signifying a woman who provides sexual services in exchange for

⁴⁵ William Prynne, *The vnloneliness, of loue-lockes* (1628), p. 38/ F4^v.

⁴⁶ Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others* (London: Routledge, 2005); Sydney Houston-Goudge, ‘Common Woman to Commodity: Changing Perceptions of Prostitution in Early Modern England, c. 1450-1550’ (unpublished master’s thesis, Dalhousie University, 2011).

⁴⁷ Thomas Wilson, *A Christian dictionarie* (London: 1612), p. 531/Mm1^r.

payment) did not enter the English lexicon until roughly the seventeenth century, and was not popularly used until later. Sexual availability is one of the few areas of agreement in the medieval conception of prostitution, that and the prostitute's public existence. The lexicographers Richard Huloet and John Florio clarify that a 'whore' must be 'commune'⁴⁸ and 'common'⁴⁹ respectively, while Thomas of Cobham offers the religious view that '[i]f someone sells herself in secret, she is not called a whore'.⁵⁰

Meanwhile, another lexicographer Randle Cotgrave understood a French 'Courtesane' to denote '[a] *Ladie, Gentlewoman, or waiting-woman of the Court*'; also (but lesse properly) a *curtizan, professed strumpet, famous (or infamous) whore*';⁵¹ the OED follows the same lines but includes '[a] court-mistress'. *The Fleire* (1607) facetiously contends that '[y]our whore is for euery rascall, but your Curtizan is for your Courtier'; conversely, the heresiographer Ephraim Pagitt (1636) declares 'Courtezan [...] the most honest synonymy that is given to a Whore'.⁵² The 'courtesan' is a descendant of the Ancient Greek *hetaira*, a sex-worker who is distinguished from the *pornê* or 'the common streetwalker or occupant of brothels' and whose name might have been utilized to signify 'a woman's manumission from sexual slavery and her acquisition of free

⁴⁸ Richard Huloet, *Abecedarium Anglico Latinum* (London: 1552), Piii v.

⁴⁹ John Florio, *A vvorlde of words* (London: 1598), p. 299/ Bb6 r.

⁵⁰ Houston-Goudge, p. 21.

⁵¹ Randle Cotgrave, *A dictionarie of the French and English tongues* (London: 1611), Yii v.

⁵² OED.

status'.⁵³ Early modern accounts of courtesans in Italy in particular help distinguish the common 'whore' from the 'courtesan', and although some may cite the subjective qualities often attributed to courtesans – namely, their refinement and skills at entertaining - I prefer to focus on questions of exclusivity, choice, and payment as more objective variables. The courtesan seemingly exercised a degree of choice in her selection of customers, often restricting her client base to a small number of men who expected their courtesan to provide more than mere sexual gratification – fortunately, as the courtesan reserved the right to refuse her sexual favours. Such men established a form of payment schedule or system of exchange with the courtesan, establishing a regular 'appointment', as it were, or at least a shared understanding that time would be made for the man in question. Of course, a courtesan would be more expensive than the average prostitute, but she would presumably have qualities which justified this elevated price.

Finally, a 'concubine' is understood by lexicographer Thomas Thomas to be '[a] woman vsed in steade of ones wife'⁵⁴ and Cotgrave concurs (Cotgrave, T4^v). The medieval concubine retained her identity as a 'de facto' wife⁵⁵ and was apparently still quite prevalent in the second and third centuries:⁵⁶ 'If a man have

⁵³ Laura K. McClure, 'Introduction', in *Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Ancient World*, ed. by Christopher A. Faraone and Laura K. McClure (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), pp. 3-20 (p. 7).

⁵⁴ Thomas Thomas, *Dictionarium linguae Latinae et Anglicanae* (London: 1587), Niiii^v.

⁵⁵ Karras, p. 100.

⁵⁶ Brundage, p. 70.

a concubine, let him desist and marry legally'.⁵⁷ Not until the third century did the Church attempt to 'assimilate concubinage to marriage', when Christian moralists such as St. Augustine began asserting the sinfulness of all extra-marital relationships⁵⁸ and Jerome defined concubines as 'one-man harlots'.⁵⁹ Significantly, both writers are keen to compare different 'types' (as it were) of woman, concluding that there was little distinction between the concubine, the wife, and the whore. The First Council of Toledo (397-400) 'finally adopted a canon that forbade married men to keep concubines [...] under pain of excommunication' (Brundage, p.101). However, even here there is differentiation: married men who indulged in this practice were excommunicated, but unmarried men were not so severely punished.⁶⁰ Further laws were imposed in 1514 when the Fifth Lateran Council forbade lay concubinage.⁶¹ These distinctions in ecclesiastical law suggest that, although the practice was fundamentally immoral, it was nonetheless more acceptable among unmarried men than those in possession of a 'real' wife. The twelfth-century jurist Gratian 'explicitly *ascribed to the concubinage relationship* the quality of marital affection which the Roman jurists reserved for marriage unions',⁶² recognizing

⁵⁷ *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St Hippolytus of Rome*, ed. by Gregory Dix and Henry Chadwick (London: Curzon, 1991), 2nd, rev. edn (p. 28).

⁵⁸ Brundage, pp. 70-71.

⁵⁹ Saint Jerome, *The Letters of St. Jerome*, trans by Charles Christopher Mierow (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1963), p. 146.

⁶⁰ Brundage, p. 101.

⁶¹ Brundage, p. 514.

⁶² Adrian Thatcher, *Marriage after Modernity: Christian Marriage in Postmodern Times* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), p. 122.

such relationships ‘as a type of informal marriage’ (Brundage, p. 245). The predominant impression of the concubine is that of an ‘unofficial’ and unprotected wife, an impression that is supported by the common medieval practice of clerical concubinage. The early modern period continued to address concubinage in religious conferences but there was little variation in its definition as an essentially exclusive domestic relationship between two (unmarried) persons who usually shared the same dwelling.

An examination of relevant texts thus demonstrates that the sexualized mistress had permeated early modern discourse by the seventeenth century, with various literary endeavours attempting to clarify or redefine the term itself. Unsurprisingly, several of these works were moralistic in tone, with the writers insisting that ‘mistress’ was a euphemistic term for various other forms of female sexual immorality. These texts indicate a pervasive anxiety regarding what exactly constituted a ‘mistress’, resulting in the traditional categorisation of this ‘type’ of woman among the mass of other women who deviated from the ‘respectable’ sexual roles assigned them by society: as ‘whores’, ‘courtesans’, or ‘concubines’. This brings me back to the question of how one is to differentiate between these monikers when early modern literature is so often keen to elide them. The word ‘whore’ may be indiscriminately applied to any unmarried and unchaste woman, a moralistic appellation which obfuscates the complexity of extramarital relationships by denouncing all. However, it is possible to perceive different degrees of sexual deviance as characterized by the specific variables of sexual exclusivity, availability, and affordability – variables which allow one to establish the particular ‘types’ of ‘loose’ women in comparison to each other, rather than in opposition to the ‘wife’. On the continuum of sexual exclusivity, the

whore lands at one extreme as a woman indiscriminate and available to all men; the concubine occupies the other extreme, exclusively devoted to one man; the courtesan exists somewhere in the middle, providing services for a select clientele. The mistress is no 'alternative wife' and thus need not be exclusive to one man, yet this title is sufficiently possessive to indicate that she is not as indiscriminate as the common whore – placing her adjacent to the courtesan on this continuum. In the context of sexual availability, the concubine moves alongside the whore: the former is completely subject to the whims of her master as a powerless, live-in domestic partner, while the latter is expected to provide services for whomever demands them. The courtesan may demonstrate discernment with her men, refusing advances if she so wishes, but is nonetheless required to be sexually available to her select clientele on a regular basis. The mistress, however, is not obligated to provide sexual services, a seemingly controversial observation that is apparently borne out by historical precedent. The variable of affordability positions the concubine as the most demanding, entirely dependent on the financial resources of her man; the courtesan follows as perhaps an expensive luxury on retainer but not the burden of one man alone; the common whore should not be expensive and a man has no financial obligation beyond immediate payment for services rendered; meanwhile, the mistress could theoretically be the cheapest alternative, for there is no expectation of remuneration or dependence.

Through a consideration of these variables, the 'sexual mistress' begins to emerge as a distinct entity even through the flux, that is, as a woman to whom a man is not married but with whom he has a reciprocal relationship, usually sexual but not necessarily so; this relationship may be adulterous, and the mistress is not

expected to reside with her lover; unlike the ‘courtesan’, ‘concubine’, and ‘whore’, a mistress is not automatically the social inferior of her lover. There is inevitable overlap between these various terms, and a woman or character may not entirely conform to one category. For example, *Othello*’s Bianca is described in the First Folio as a ‘Curtezan’, yet her relationship with Cassio is not that of a courtesan and her client. What remains most fascinating about the early modern ‘mistress’ is her apparent flexibility, reflected in the difficulty in defining her role and status. She may be elided with the sexually deviant, but she need not have a sexual relationship with a man to be considered sufficiently valued, intimate, and influential to acquire the title ‘mistress’; and, unlike the ‘whore’, ‘courtesan’, and ‘concubine’, there are no specific expectations of her behaviour and no specific duties she must embrace to keep the title – whether domestic, sexual, or financial. Historical and literary mistresses were a diverse group, refusing simple categorization through their ability to shape their own unique identities, in defiance of simplistic moral binaries that allow others to characterize them as mere ‘whores’. The simplest definition of ‘mistress’ for my thesis consists of the following: a woman engaged in a relationship with a man with whom she is prepared to have sex outside of the confines of marriage. I will use the phrase ‘sexual mistress’ as a short-hand for this definition, primarily to differentiate it from the ‘courtly mistress’ – that is, the mistress of courtly love, Petrarchan poetry, and Neoplatonism. However, ‘sexual mistress’ does not signify that the woman to whom it applies is necessarily engaged in sexual relations but rather that there is an expectation that the relationship could become sexual if it was not already.

4. The Mistress in Drama

I have established above that the meaning of ‘mistress’ was not fixed between 1555-1642, and I have demonstrated its various uses in early modern non-dramatic literature. I will now examine the use of the term specifically in dramatic literature, looking at how playwrights exploited the variety of meanings and their efforts to clarify what particular breed of mistress they are describing or depicting. The notion of a sexualised mistress had permeated early modern discourse by 1555, but it continued to compete with its courtly love incarnation. Indeed, the emergence of the Neoplatonic cult in the 1630s meant that the decayed institution of courtly love was revived and recalibrated. However, many dramatists exploited this discrepancy in meaning, acknowledging the term’s literary association with courtly love but suggesting that its use was sometimes euphemistic; as such, they imply a sexual relationship without explicitly stating as much. James Shirley, for instance, enjoyed creating works that embraced the Neoplatonic mistress as well as others that mocked or challenged this notion. *Love in a Maze* (1632) has Yongrave maintain the principles of courtly love when declaring that he is ‘[a]s true a lover as yet ever Mistris / Could boast possession of’ (IV), presenting himself as a ‘prisoner still to [his] *Eugenia*’ (IV).⁶³ However, other works like *The Duke’s Mistress* (1635/6) explore the multiple meanings of mistress.

The Duke’s Mistress portrays a chaste woman pursued by the Duke; her chaste disinterest suggests a courtly figure, but the Duke’s sexual intentions undermine the traditional dichotomy of mistress and servant so prominent in

⁶³ James Shirley, *Changes: or, Love in a maze* (London: 1632), p. 44/ G3v.

courtly love literature. The Duke engages in rhetoric that suggests courtly devotion:

I am transform'd with my excesse of rapture

[...]

when thou hast throwne down

Thy servant (I.1.347-350).⁶⁴

These Neoplatonic sentiments complement the consistent identification of Ardelia as the Duke's 'courtly mistress'. However, Ardelia makes it clear that she is importuned and constricted in a manner that is anathema to the courtly tradition:

I was made beleeve you lov'd me,

Which though my force resisted, by some practises

You gaind my person hither, and in Court

Command my stay – (III.1.140-3)

This suggests a form of imprisonment, a blatant abuse of the Duke's social superiority and power in his efforts to seduce a subject – not the behaviour of the courtly 'servant' who idolises and respects his unattainable lady from afar. Petrarchan imagery often evokes imprisonment, but of the enraptured lover not the idolised mistress: 'I'm not confined, yet cannot I depart' (*Petrarch in English*, p. 166). Other characters, such as Valerio, identify Ardelia as the Duke's 'concubine' (IV.1.366), a seeming misuse of the term as Ardelia cannot act as a de-facto wife to a man who already possesses one and who expresses no desire

⁶⁴ James Shirley, *The Dukes Mistris*, ed. by Kim Walker (London: Garland Publishing, 1988).

for Ardelia to assume such a domestic role. Eventually Ardelia is instructed that she ‘must consent this night to his embrace / Or take what follows’ (V.1.2-4). Courtly love is thus degraded, while the reciprocal marital love that is revived between the Duke and his discarded Duchess as well as between the betrothed Ardelia and Bentivolio is elevated as the superior option.

The conventions of courtly love were already being mocked at the turn of the century, as evidenced by *Antonio and Mellida* (1599) when four different suitors lay claim to one ‘mistress’ (II.1.134): the service they offer her and her disdain are exaggerated to the point of absurdity, thus mocking the hyperbolic rhetoric of courtly love.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, Felice asks Flavia to ‘be [his] mistress’ (242), claiming that he already possesses ‘nineteen mistresses’ and that she ‘shouldst make up the full score’ (244-5). This plurality of mistresses suggests that Felice intends Flavia to be his ‘sexual mistress’ as few courtly romances feature a man simultaneously offering his entire devotion to a multitude of unattainable ladies; instead, Felice applies the term euphemistically to his sexual partners. He further states that Flavia is, ‘by art, too fair to be beloved’ (257), suggesting that she is too attractive to hold herself aloof in the manner of a courtly mistress and therefore should engage with him sexually.

Felice’s seemingly lascivious intentions demonstrates that the sexual meaning of ‘mistress’ was in use on the early modern stage during this period and becoming increasingly common: ‘At the same time that one lyes tortured upon the Racke, another lyes tumbling with his Mistresse over head and eares in downe

⁶⁵ John Marston, *Antonio and Mellida*, The Revels Plays, ed. by W. Reavley Gair (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

and feathers' (II.1).⁶⁶ *The Fountain of Self-Love* (1601) describes how one may may '[play] with his mistresse paps' (III.4),⁶⁷ and *The Phoenix* (c. 1603) has one character suggest that mistresses were wont to give men venereal diseases (9. 188-97).⁶⁸ As with Felice, many characters utilise 'mistress' euphemistically, glossing a lascivious relationship with a veneer of courtly respectability, an hypocrisy decried in *Monsieur d'Olive* (1605) as 'a Court tearme'.⁶⁹

Such cynicism towards courtly love conventions centres around the flexibility of such terms as 'mistress', revealing that this term no longer signified the unattainable, chaste mistress of Petrarchan sonnets but was a 'Court tearme' that denoted a sexual relationship. 'Mistress' was a word with variable meanings, but the sexual meaning had comfortably established itself within the early modern lexicon. *The Isle of Gulls* indicates that one could 'hold it law|full to lie with [a mistress], though she be another mans wife' (I.1)⁷⁰, while *The Faithful Shepherdess* (1608) has a character remark: 'were I common mistris to the love / Of every swaine' (I.2.168-9).⁷¹ This latter example reveals one method with which playwrights distinguished between different types of mistress, with

⁶⁶ Thomas Heywood, *The fair maid of the vvest* (London: 1631), p. 18/ D2^r.

⁶⁷ Ben Jonson, *The fontaine of selfe-loue* (London: 1601), F3^v.

⁶⁸ Thomas Middleton, *The Phoenix*, ed. by Lawrence Danson and Ivo Kamps, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, gen. eds. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino, pp. 91-127 (p. 112).

⁶⁹ George Chapman, *Monsieur D'Oliue* (London: 1606), B2^v.

⁷⁰ John Day, *The ile of guls* (London: 1606), C1^v.

⁷¹ John Fletcher, *The Faithful Shepherdess*, ed. by Cyrus Hoy, in *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, gen. ed. Fredson Bowers, 10 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), IV, pp. 483-612 (p. 509).

adjectives such as ‘courtly’, ‘common’, and ‘wanton’ appearing alongside ‘mistress’ in an effort to clarify meaning.

As already mentioned above, Chapman had a character dismiss ‘mistress’ as a ‘Court tearme’, suggestive of the courtesan. *The Whore of Babylon* (1607) and *The Devil’s Law-Case* (1623) include a ‘court mistris’⁷² and a ‘courtly Mistris’ (III.1.)⁷³ respectively. However, the use of ‘courtly’ does little to clarify matters, with ‘courtly’ or ‘Court’ acquiring different connotations depending on the identity of the character speaking or the context in which they speak. Other adjectives are less ambiguous, and when combined with ‘mistress’ they create a clear picture of a sexual mistress: ‘common mistress’ (*A Noble Spanish Soldier*, 1622),⁷⁴ ‘looser Mistresse’ (*A Fine Companion*, 1632-3),⁷⁵ and ‘secret mistress’ (*The Strange Discovery*, 1640).⁷⁶ ‘Common’ was traditionally applied to ‘whore’, while ‘secret’ implies the opposite (see Thomas of Cobham), demonstrating the continued flexibility over the meaning of ‘mistress’.

Some plays are more overt in their clarifications, such as *The Woman-Hater* (1607): ‘extoll their whores, which they call mistresses, with heauenly praises’ (IV.1).⁷⁷ *The Lady of Pleasure* (1635) also declares that ‘[a] mistress in

⁷² Thomas Dekker, *The vvhore of Babylon* (London: 1607), G2^r.

⁷³ John Webster, *The deuils law-case* (London: 1623), G3^r.

⁷⁴ Thomas Dekker, *The Noble Spanish Soldier*, ed. by Zachary Lesser (London: Nick Hern Books in association with Globe Education, 2006), I.2.179.

⁷⁵ Shackerly Marmion, *A fine companion* (London: 1633), A3^r.

⁷⁶ J. G., *The strange discovery* (London: 1640), IV.7 (I4^v).

⁷⁷ Francis Beaumont, *The vvoman hater* (London: 1607), F4^r.

the wanton sense is common' (V.3.158).⁷⁸ A gender-neutral word, 'wanton' signifies a lack of self-control or immoderation, which was why it was often used with children. However, it gradually came to mean sexually loose and its use here demonstrates not only Shirley's effort to clarify that he means a 'sexual mistress' rather than an unattainable 'courtly mistress', but also that any sexually-active woman outside of marriage was implicitly conflated with the indiscriminate and uncontrolled 'whore' in the early modern imagination regardless of her number of lovers. Like with the aforementioned 'harlotry mistress' (Whateley), it was difficult to disentangle the 'sexual mistress' from moral discourses.

The existence of these alternative meanings requires the reader to contextualise the use of 'mistress' on each occasion, establishing if the writer is using the term to denote a reciprocal partner or a woman whom the desirer intends to idolise. Moreover, 'mistress' was complicated by its later use to signify one's betrothed or future bride: the betrothed mistress was the presumably chaste object of a man's affections (thus resembling the mistress of courtly love), but she also anticipates sexual congress with the man who calls her his mistress (like the sexual mistress). These alternative meanings frequently lead to ambiguity on the early modern stage, and many playwrights have their characters clarify the type of mistress they mean when it remains unclear. The term 'mistress' denoting a (potential) sexual partner was in use in the mid-sixteenth century, and certainly acquired a grim hold on the early modern imagination by the end of the seventeenth, but there was little to no consistency in application. However, by

⁷⁸James Shirley, *The Lady of Pleasure*, *The Revels Plays*, ed. by Ronald Huebert (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p. 185.

1631 Richard Brome has a character confidently state that she is the King's mistress, without any effort at clarification or anyone else disputing the term. This is despite the fact that the same character is referred to as a 'Concubine' in the play's title, a term that she never applies to herself and is only used once in the play itself by a hostile character. It is also worth noting that, as mentioned above, Shirley has a character proclaim that a 'wanton' mistress was 'common', which further indicates that the modern meaning of 'mistress' had sufficiently permeated the early modern lexicon to be a familiar dramatic trope; 'common', meanwhile, establishes both the familiarity of the figure as well as reminding the audience of the 'common whore' with which 'mistress' is frequently elided and thus signifies the continued conflation of female sexual categories and the flexibility of 'mistress'.

I contend that the early modern theatre was instrumental in establishing the sexual understanding of mistress through its depiction of specific characters that can be retroactively recognised as 'modern mistresses'. I am obliged to be pre-emptive by employing the term 'mistress' in its modern meaning as it had not fully infiltrated the early modern lexicon until later in the period; however, I will demonstrate how the stage negotiates the emergence and consolidated the modern definition of 'mistress' and thus created the 'modern' or 'sexual mistress' performatively. Unlike prose and poetry, the understanding of 'mistress' can be dynamically addressed through characters contesting or debating their sexual condition on stage, and in so doing they reveal the inadequacies of pre-existing categories of womanhood - categories which neglected women engaged in extra-marital relationships that are sexual in nature but who cannot be identified as whores, courtesans, or concubines. This neglect is matched by current criticism in

which the aforementioned sexual categories of womanhood are frequently analysed, but no one is researching how the ‘modern mistress’ emerged through theatrical performance.

5. The Mistress in Criticism

The early modern ‘mistress’ has received no critical attention *per se*, but studies of marriage, of prostitution, and of women in general have addressed issues that in this thesis I treat as the domain of the emerging figure of the ‘mistress’. I will provide a brief overview of several overlapping fields of criticism and demonstrate how my research contributes to the study of the textual representation of early modern women. My thesis engages with the female experience of sex and marriage, and Joan Kelly’s essay ‘Did Women have a Renaissance?’ (1984) has had a significant impact on my work. Of particular interest was Kelly’s engagement with the traditions of courtly love, and her suggestion that its medieval incarnation encouraged a mutuality between the aristocratic woman and her lover that was expressed through an adulterous, sexual relationship;⁷⁹ this changed with the ascent of writers like Castiglione who promulgated ‘both a Neo-Platonic notion of spiritual love and the double standard’ (Kelly, p. 40). I do not agree with her findings for, much like the work of Alice Clark and Lawrence Stone, I find such approaches simplistic in their evaluation of early modern women’s social situation, specifically how distinct

⁷⁹ Joan Kelly, *Women, History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 25-28.

historical periods offered vastly different opportunities to women.⁸⁰ However, Kelly's analysis of female sexual behaviour in relation to courtly literature encouraged my analysis of the same in literature of performance.

Martin Ingram (1987) examines the conversation between popular and official perceptions of sexual morality within marriage and argues that church courts were effective regulators of sexual behaviour.⁸¹ Margaret R. Sommerville also focuses on the control of female sexuality but as articulated in patriarchal literature rather than a legal institution. I cannot agree with her argument that such texts influenced all levels of society because it does not fully address the gap between theory and practice. However, she does provide an insightful chapter examining the ambiguities in moral prescriptions - which seemingly allowed for male adultery despite the almost universal condemnation of the double standard by the era's moralists.⁸² This double standard was one confronted by many early modern women engaged in extra-marital liaisons who would inevitably experience the disapproval of their community in a different way than their lovers. Sommerville's book is complemented by Elizabeth A. Foyster's 1999 study of early modern 'manhood', revealing that 'the patriarchal ideal had costs for men's lives as well as women' and that women possessed considerable power

⁸⁰ Anthony J. Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England, 1500-1800* (London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 204).

⁸¹ Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁸² Margaret R. Sommerville, *Sex and Subjection: Attitudes to Women in Early Modern Society* (London and New York: E. Arnold, 1995).

over the development of a man's identity.⁸³ I concur, as a woman's sexual conduct could irreparably damage a man's reputation as well as her own, thus explaining the anxiety that Mark Breitenberg claims early modern men endured as a consequence of patriarchal proscriptions that enforced and were dependent on female chastity.⁸⁴

Laura Gowing (2012) explicitly articulates what is often implicit in others' work: despite the prevailing perception that sexual assertiveness in women is 'disorderly', 'the early modern period had a language for women's desire and an understanding that women required sexual satisfaction'.⁸⁵ As I will demonstrate in this thesis, sexual assertiveness is repeatedly demonstrated by theatrical characters who occupy the cultural space of the 'modern mistress', frequently in opposition to male endeavours to impose specific sexual identities and boundaries upon them. In a similar vein to Gowing, Foyster indicates that the husbands of adulterous wives were frequently indicted for their sexual inadequacy, while Sommerville suggests that 'the one area where the wife ruled the husband as he did her was the carnal' (Sommerville, p. 133); I will expand both arguments to explore the effect that a woman engaged in extra-marital liaisons can have on the men with whom she interacts and society at large. As I argue in this thesis, the emerging modern meaning of 'mistress' that was being developed performatively onstage represented one form of early modern female sexual agency; had Gowing

⁸³ Elizabeth A. Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England: Honour, Sex, and Marriage* (London: Longman, 1999), p. 3.

⁸⁴ Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity: Sexual Jealousy in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁸⁵ Laura Gowing, *Gender Relations in Early Modern England* (Harlow: Pearson, 2012), p. 19.

and Foyster known of this, they could have been more explicit about this ‘language for women’s desire’.

A related field of criticism that has attracted a lot of attention over the last few decades is the study of women’s participation and representation in the theatrical community. As my thesis argues that the figure of the ‘mistress’ was largely created through her presentation on stage, it is necessary to be aware of the extent to which early modern women interacted with the theatre during this period. Clare McManus addresses the tradition of court masques, arguing that masques allowed for female self-expression through dance and display, but the participants differ from public players in their efforts not to conceal or alter their social identity.⁸⁶ She observes that performing or refusing to perform in masques could comprise acts of both expression and resistance. Moreover, she highlights the importance of performance in the larger political sphere, namely in establishing and controlling Queen Anna’s public face in a new country.

Sophie Tomlinson’s 2005 revisionist study continues the work of McManus despite holding a lower opinion of masques than McManus. Tomlinson contends that women’s participation in theatrical culture at courts contributed not only to ‘a new sexual realism in works performed by and associated with both queens’, but also to ‘a new focus on female expressiveness and a woman’s

⁸⁶ Clare McManus, *Women on the Renaissance Stage: Anna of Denmark and Female Masquing in the Stuart Court 1590-1619* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); ‘Introduction: the Queen’s Court’ by Clare McManus, in *Women and Culture at the Courts of the Stuart Queens* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp.1-18; ‘Memorialising Anna of Denmark: *Cupid’s Banishment* at Greenwich Palace’ by McManus, in *Women and Culture at the Courts of the Stuart Queens*, pp. 81-99.

articulation of sexual desire'.⁸⁷ She argues that '[w]omen's voices were heard at the Caroline court in ways they were not during James's reign, as actors and sponsors of plays' (Tomlinson, p. 16). She connects the eloquent silence of (most) court masques with moments of eloquent silence in the public theatre, demonstrating the influence that courtly performance traditions had on the public theatre. Of particular interest to my study is her examination of pastoral drama - which she identifies as 'geared towards a female audience and readership' - and the manner in which it engaged 'with the problem of how women may chastely testify their love' (Tomlinson, p. 49). This illuminates the lack of female testimony evident in courtly love literature, and thus aided my effort to disentangle women from their fundamentally passive literary incarnation as a Petrarchan or Neoplatonic 'mistress'. Tomlinson also explores representations of women's legal status in comedy and female characters' use of theatricality 'as a means of self-empowerment' (Tomlinson, p. 113), an area of research to which I will contribute in my final chapter.

Women Players in England, 1500-1660 is a self-described 'feminist project' which endeavoured to expand prior research into the female player; specifically, beyond the notion of London-based, elite English performers.⁸⁸ It explores the negotiations that women players had to engage in in order to exert some control over 'their own display', for otherwise 'they were entirely subjected

⁸⁷ Sophie Tomlinson, *Women on Stage in Stuart Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.14.

⁸⁸ Pamela Allen Brown and Peter Parolin, 'Introduction', in *Women Players in England, 1500-1660: Beyond the All-Male Stage* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), ed. Pamela Allen Brown and Peter Parolin, pp. 1-24 (p.19).

to the violence of representation' (Allen Brown and Parolin, p. 8) – much like the 'mistress' of courtly love. One such form of representation was sexual shaming; I agree that there is limited opportunity for agency when women are 'paraded to cuckstool[s]' (p. 8), but there is opportunity for a performance once the shamed woman is brought before an audience. Such opportunities are exploited by early modern women in church courts and, as I will demonstrate in chapter four, the theatre recognised the utility of judicial courts as a forum for female expression and resistance. Unlike the performances of 'ballad singers' and 'mountebanks' (p. 5), however, the theatre does not have female performers expressing themselves before an audience but rather boy-players reciting the words of male-playwrights. My study focuses on the characters and the cultural context of the stage 'mistress', and a larger discussion about the effect of the ventriloquised female voice as mediated through men is beyond the scope of this thesis; further research into the effect of women working as performers adjacent to early modern theatre companies, and female workers who contributed to the industry in other ways, on the resisting female voice as conveyed through male performers and playwrights would be a useful expansion on this thesis.

In his chapter, Parolin engages in the same field as Tomlinson when he elaborates on the similarity between theatrical performance and legal settings, noting how a woman's skills at masquing may be transferrable in a court of law and can be a source of power – much as I will in chapter four.⁸⁹ Natasha Korda elaborates on the network of women who contributed to theatrical production

⁸⁹ Parolin, 'The Venetian Theater of Aletheia Talbot, Countess of Arundel', in *Women Players in England, 1500-1660: Beyond the All-Male Stage*, ed. Allen Brown and Parolin, pp. 219-240.

beyond that of performer. Significantly, she connects their industry to theatrical representation of women, exploring the influence these women had on the portrayal of specifically working women.⁹⁰ I agree with Natasha Korda's assertion regarding the influence that the working female community had on representations of women onstage:

women's work [...] had a shaping influence on dramatic literature and its staging [...] This influence appears not only in the representation of working women in play texts but also [...] in the performance idioms of the professional players, who borrowed from the vocal and gestural repertoire of working women'.⁹¹

They thus provide dramatists and players with a useful resource that allowed for greater nuance in female characters.

Natalie Mears makes the compelling point that Henrietta Maria, coming from a European background, pushed against restriction on female performance at court and certain performances (such as *The Shepherds' Paradise*) revealed 'the constructed nature of social identity';⁹² as I will demonstrate, the same topic was being explored on the public stage as well. Indeed, Henrietta Maria's own attendance at public playhouses and her commissioning of performances at court encouraged the exchange of performative practices between traditional court entertainments and public theatre. Erin Griffey acknowledges McManus's

⁹⁰ Natasha Korda, 'Women's Informal Commerce and the "All-Male" Stage', in *Women Players in England, 1500-1660: Beyond the All-Male Stage*, ed. Allen Brown and Parolin, pp. 259-280.

⁹¹ Natasha Korda, *Labors Lost: Women's Work and the Early Modern English Stage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), p. 53.

⁹² Natalie Mears, *Queenship and Political Discourse in the Elizabethan Realms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 116.

research by encouraging critics to look at Stuart queens' patronage in other areas of cultural production – not merely theatre and literature.⁹³

The mistress has not been the focus of any academic studies of early modern culture. There has recently been a plethora of populist history texts focusing on relatively superficial analyses of mistresses but she remains unexplored in early modern criticism. However, there has been a considerable amount of work analysing the make-up of early modern prostitution and its effect on the theatre. Ruth Mazo Karras's two large studies of this field in 1996 and 2005 provide a wealth of information that proved enormously influential to my thesis. The latter in particular examines the ambiguities of sexual relationships that may not be easily identified or categorised, although I disagree with her contention that '[a] concubine could also mean someone who has a sexual relationship with a married man, what in later times would have been called a mistress' (*Doing Unto Others*, p. 100). Such elisions of mistress with other categories of women who engage in extra-marital relationships appear standard in recent accounts, and I hope in my thesis to adjust critical perceptions in this regard. Karras's 2005 book also raises intriguing questions about a woman's potential complicity in rape and the spectre of sexual coercion that haunts many a relationship of this period; I will expand on this theme in my first chapter.

Domestic Dangers (1996) focuses on female testimony and its endeavours to establish – as much as one can – a woman's unadulterated voice from the mass

⁹³ Erin Griffey, 'Introduction', in *Henrietta Maria: Piety, Politics and Patronage* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), ed. Erin Griffey, pp. 1-12.

of male writings. Gowing observes that '[w]ords [...] were crucially linked with reputation' (*Domestic Dangers*, p.111) and thus reveals why terminology denoting sexual identities is so important; the significance of words like 'mistress' and 'whore' in early modern society and plays must not be underestimated as a means to categorise and neutralise women. Furthermore, Gowing makes the revealing observation that members of the early modern community were unsure about what exactly constituted a legitimate, or licit, sexual relationship and thus could easily find themselves part of the illicit. I will expand on her work in my final chapter, exploring how the early modern courtroom acted as a forum for discussion of women's sexual identities and the ambiguous demarcations between different types of relationships.

There are several detailed analyses of sexual relationships depicted onstage, one of which is Anne Margaret Gill's 'A kynde of woman beast: The Invention of the Female Bawd' (PhD thesis, King's College London, 2007). This thesis directly inspired my own, for this comprised a comprehensive analysis of a familiar figure on the early modern stage that had never been directly addressed despite the wealth of critical material about sex and women during this period. Duncan Salkeld (2012) explores the relationship between Italian cultural and literary traditions and the English theatre in their depiction of courtesans. His exploration of a neglected theatrical figure on the early modern stage is welcome and he approaches the subject from a variety of directions. However, he does not properly differentiate the 'courtesan', 'concubine' and 'whore' in his study: 'What was it, however, that distinguished the 'hetaera' from a 'porne', a courtesan from a whore? [...] Precise delineations seem inadequate, and possible responses to these questions are likely to shift with the currents of social attitude

or taste’.⁹⁴ As I demonstrated above, this is a necessary process if one wants to conduct a study of a specific type of woman. Salkeld conflates disparate types of women under the title ‘courtesan’, and one such woman is Jane Shore, Edward IV’s mistress and a character in two extant early modern plays. He identifies her as a ‘courtesan’ and a ‘concubine’ without clarification, and as I demonstrate above it is a mistake to elide these women. This identification of Jane Shore as simultaneously courtesan and concubine – neither of which is an appropriate term for the character – is symptomatic of the neglect that the ‘mistress’ has received in early modern theatrical criticism and the assumption that it would be anachronistic to refer to these women as ‘mistresses’. I will direct my attention to Jane Shore in the first two chapters of my thesis, and both times she is identified by the correct title of ‘mistress’.

The mistress is occasionally the subject of academic articles, although the two examples I located situate her within an Italian context. Catherine Lawless (1993) provides a definition for ‘mistress’: ‘The term “mistress” is unsatisfactory and gendered [...] Nevertheless, due to the lack of a suitable alternative [...] the word mistress will be used to indicate women who were sexually active outside wedlock’.⁹⁵ Lawless acknowledges the need to recognise the mistress as a distinct entity in her own right and, although I am not entirely satisfied with her definition, it serves its function in her examination of certain Florentine

⁹⁴ Duncan Salkeld, *Shakespeare Among the Courtesans: Prostitution, Literature, and Drama, 1500-1650* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), p. 7.

⁹⁵ Catherine Lawless, ‘Women on the Margins: The “Beloved” and the “Mistress” in Renaissance Florence’, in *Studies on Medieval and Early Modern Women: Pawns or Players?*, ed. by Christine Meek and Catherine Lawless (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), pp. 11-130 (p. 112).

mistresses. I am particularly impressed by her efforts to contrast the mistress as she understands it with the ‘beloved’ of courtly love literature, and her work in this section significantly influenced my own analysis. Helen S. Ettlinger expands on Lawless’s work by clarifying her understanding of what constitutes a mistress, declaring that ‘[to have] a mistress by definition implies a more long-lasting relationship’ (Ettlinger, p.770).⁹⁶ She continues with a fascinating observation about ‘[t]he problems surrounding the historical study of mistresses either as individuals or as a generic group’. She endeavours to differentiate between concubines, mistresses and favourites, but only in an Italian context with the Italian language. Unlike Lawless and Ettlinger, I focus exclusively on the English understanding of the mistress as conveyed through early modern literature in general and plays in particular. I will analyse the representation of women occupying the role of ‘sexual mistress’ on the early modern stage, utilising the methodology detailed below.

6. Thesis Overview

In the first chapter I examine Thomas Heywood’s *Edward IV Part I & 2*, Thomas Middleton’s *Women Beware Women*, and Middleton and Rowley’s *The Changeling*. These playwrights subvert the tropes of courtly literature and sexualise the ‘courtly mistress’ through their portrayal of sexual coercion. I contend that these encounters are rendered ambiguous as a reflection of early modern rape narratives. The new focus on consent in these texts placed female sexual agency centre stage. The coerced woman on stage who subsequently

⁹⁶ Helen S. Ettlinger, ‘Visibilis et Invisibilis: The Mistress in Italian Renaissance Court Society’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 47 (1994), pp. 770-792.

engages in a sexual relationship with her violator is evincing agency and is thus no longer the passive 'courtly mistress' but a new, sexualised version of a 'mistress'.

In the second chapter, I examine the sexualised mistress in its most public incarnation. Utilising *The True Tragedy of Richard the Third*, Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy*, and Philip Massinger's *The Roman Actor*, I explore the developing understanding of the mistress as something other than a courtly presence with emotional ascendancy over her lover - but no active demonstration of agency or power - in dramatic representations of royal/imperial courts, arguing that playwrights represent this new breed of mistress by emphasising how her troublingly unofficial presence allows her to usurp the prerogatives and masculinity of male characters.

In the third chapter, however, I demonstrate that dramatists' representation of the most recent and prominent royal mistress reveals their efforts to avoid simplistic characterisations of the emerging modern mistress; they do so by representing the controversial Anne Boleyn as something other than a villain, the antithesis or enemy of the legitimate wife, or as a shameful stain on history and society. I focus my study on *Henry VIII* by John Fletcher and William Shakespeare and *The Queen and Concubine* by Richard Brome. The dramatists use a strategy to provide a dramatic portrayal that reflects early modern historical sources and thus spread this message about Anne Boleyn to a theatrical public, an exploitation of the dramatic form that I examine in greater detail in the 'Mistress on trial' chapter.

The fourth and last chapter demonstrates how dramatists exploit the possibilities of theatre to allow characters that can be retroactively identified as

‘modern mistresses’ to argue against erroneous efforts to categorise them as something they are not, demonstrating the inadequacy of pre-existing categories of womanhood and their ideological misuse by male characters. The trial scenes in Thomas Webster’s *The White Devil* and Francis Beaumont and Philip Massinger’s *The Spanish Curate* allow playwrights to demonstrate the significance of performance and how the theatrical arena allows for the (ventriloquised) female voice to resist incorrect or outdated terminology that may be applied to them - as I have been doing in this thesis. These characters’ outspoken resistance to erroneous categorisation reveals the public’s drive for a more coherent understanding of certain social roles, most notably the ‘mistress’ in its developing modern meaning.

What will become apparent throughout my analysis is that there was a recognisable pattern of stage behaviour in the figure of the ‘sexual mistress’: her resistance to male efforts at categorisation and the inadequacy of such categories; her sexuality providing her a controversial access to power; her similarity and connection to the wife and her position; and the fact that she is always a transformative figure. These elements of her portrayal become apparent in the representations I discuss in each chapter, ultimately contributing to an understanding of ‘mistress’ as a woman engaged in an extra-marital relationship that is potentially sexual. This pattern is most evident in the mistresses of histories and tragedies, particularly their transformative effect upon the world of the play, and consequently these genres are the ones on which I will focus in the course of my thesis.

It is through representation on stage that the audience developed a stronger understanding of what constituted a ‘mistress’ in her modern meaning, how she

was differentiated from other categories of womanhood, and the role she inhabited in the early modern community. My thesis rectifies the omission of the ‘mistress’ in criticism by exploring extra-marital relationships in early modern England and the theatre’s role in influencing culture. It explores female sexual identities and contributes to the study of gender and sexuality, particularly the equivocation of power relations in socially-unrecognised sexual relationships. I will expand Gowing, Sommerville and Foyster’s analyses of the anxiety generated by female sexual assertiveness in early modern England, exploring specifically the theatre’s engagement with this pervasive anxiety by negotiating the emergence of the ‘modern mistress’ onstage; as I will demonstrate, she is a dramatic figure that comes to encapsulate much of these anxieties in the agency she evinces that elevates her beyond her courtly love roots, her illegitimacy and ambivalence, and finally her vocal resistance to disadvantageous categorisation. Because the modern meaning of ‘mistress’ was still in development during the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, playwrights engaged with the cultural process of establishing what exactly she was and how she functioned in society through their portrayals of women who occupy the social and cultural space of the ‘modern mistress’. This thesis thus demonstrates that early modern playwrights helped develop the modern understanding of ‘the mistress’: that is, a woman engaged in a relationship with a man with whom she is prepared to have sex outside of the confines of marriage.

CHAPTER ONE

Transforming the Courtly Mistress on Stage:

Theatre and Etymological Change

In Act Four scene one of *Women Beware Women*, Bianca and the Duke discuss her husband's new relationship with the widowed Livia:

BIANCA: He comes vaunting here of his new love,

 And the new clothes she gave him. Lady Livia,

 Who but she now his mistress?

 [...]

 He showed me her name, sir,

 In perfumed paper, her vows, her letter,

 With an intent to spite me (*Women Beware Women*, IV.1.116-
21).⁹⁷

Livia is identified as Leantio's 'mistress', yet this could be perceived as the courtly term denoting the unattainable object of a man's desire. However, this understanding of the term is soon to be undermined for the audience by Livia's own words upon seeing Leantio: 'I have enough to buy me my desires, / And yet to spare (III.2.64-5). This is, in other words, a woman who approached a man and engaged him in a sexual relationship. The Duke confirms this interpretation by his

⁹⁷ Thomas Middleton, *Women Beware Women*, ed. by John Jowett, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, gen. eds. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 1488-1541.

later reference to Livia's 'bed-fellow' (IV.1.145). This is no Petrarchan mistress receiving the devotion of a suffering lover, but rather a 'mistress' in its modern meaning of a sexual partner of a man outside the confines of marriage. The modern 'mistress' was therefore finding her way onto the early modern stage by the early 1620s, but the question is: how?

The above quotation evinces a growing comprehension of the term 'mistress' in its modern form on the seventeenth-century stage. Notably, the character of Livia is not the most prominent 'mistress' in *Women Beware Women*: that is Bianca, the Duke's lover. She belongs to an under-examined category of women in plays of this period – namely, those that portray the apparent rape of a woman who subsequently engages in a sexual relationship with her attacker outside the confines of marriage. These women feature in Thomas Heywood's *Edward IV Parts 1 and 2* (c. 1599), Thomas Middleton's *Women Beware Women* (c. 1621), and Middleton and William Rowley's *The Changeling* (1622). Each raped woman can be characterised as a 'mistress' in the modern understanding of the term; for instance, both Jane Shore and Edward are married to others in *Edward IV*, yet they patently engage in a sexual relationship. This extra-marital sexual relationship leads Shore's husband to refer to her as 'Edward's concubine' (*1 Edward IV*, 22.26), an inadequate term as she does not occupy the position of unofficial wife confined to his household – indeed, there is little interaction between her and Edward following their sexual encounter and she moves independently from him throughout the play.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Thomas Heywood, *The first and second parts of King Edward IV*, The Revels Plays, ed. by Richard Rowland (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

Moreover, she is eager to return to her husband should he forgive her. The Queen's son Dorset refers to her as a 'whore' (2 *Edward IV*, 10.36), but this is obviously an invective considering his animus toward her and the absence in her case of the kind of indiscriminate sexual availability that characterises the early modern whore; Aire and the Queen are more accurate than the others when they identify her as 'the King's beloved / A special friend' (1 *Edward IV*, 22.8-9) and 'King Edward's bedfellow' (2 *Edward IV*, 10.16) respectively. Bianca in *Women Beware Women* similarly receives her share of invective, notably from her husband Leantio, who refers to her as a 'strumpet' (*Women Beware Women*, IV.1.63). Like Jane Shore, she resides in the court of her lover but she does not assume a strictly domestic role and she remains married to another; as such, she should not be identified as a concubine and no character makes an effort to do so. She is not characterised as a 'mistress' in its sexual sense, but the above exchange concerning Livia outlines the parameters for such a relationship, and an audience would certainly perceive similarities between Livia ('mistress' of Leantio) and Bianca ('mistress' of the Duke). *The Changeling's* depiction of Beatrice-Joanna's relationship with her servant De Flores differs from the other two plays in that it remains secret until the end, accentuating the illicitness of a union that cannot bear public scrutiny. Beatrice-Joanna, as De Flores's social superior, does not occupy the role of unofficial wife confined to a man's household, and she conducts this affair while simultaneously organising her marriage to another. Consequently, she should not be categorised as a concubine, and the lack of indiscriminate sexuality or the receipt of any form of payment also renders the title of whore or courtesan unlikely. These women, from a modern perspective, can be identified as 'mistresses'.

However, this definition of ‘mistress’ was only beginning to emerge during the early modern period and had not developed a solid foothold in the public’s mental vocabulary. Other than its use as the feminine form of ‘master’ or a general title of address, ‘mistress’ continued to signify the ‘courtly mistress’ of Petrarchan poetry to the early modern mind. It is through the work of playwrights like Heywood, Middleton and Rowley that this understanding of ‘mistress’ began to shift, with the unattainable and venerated mistress gradually becoming the sexualised and proactive ‘mistress’ of subsequent years. In this chapter, I will seek to elaborate on the way in which this courtly understanding of ‘mistress’ is transformed into its modern meaning through the plays I have cited and their representations of Jane Shore, Bianca and Beatrice-Joanna.

The modern understanding of ‘mistress’ includes a sexual component. Although the relationship may not include sexual relations, the possibility or probability of sex is a central element to this modern understanding of the ‘mistress’ as is the woman’s participation in the relationship that forms. The prevailing understanding of ‘mistress’ in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century was in its courtly and Petrarchan incarnation, which is characterised by the beloved mistress’s passivity as a venerated object of another’s desire who is expected to resist or ignore sexual overtures. There was resistance to this conception of the mistress, however, as evidenced by poets such as Donne who subvert the poetic conventions by sexualising the mistress in their poetry, as well as the sarcastic tone adopted by several characters in plays who utilise the term euphemistically. These undercurrents of shifting perceptions found overt expression on the early modern stage in three specific plays: *Edward IV*, *Women Beware Women*, and *The Changeling*.

These plays depict women who become ‘mistresses’ in the modern sense, in that each engages in a relationship of some duration with a man that is sexual in nature. I argue that the playwrights intentionally subvert the concept of the ‘courtly mistress’ by firstly evoking then irrevocably sexualising the ‘mistress’ of courtly love, thus developing the earlier understanding of the term ‘mistress’ to incorporate the sexual component that is essential to the modern understanding of ‘mistress’. They compound this shift in meaning, as I will show, by addressing the issue of female sexual agency. These dramatists intentionally engage with the development of legal understandings of rape during the early modern period when depicting the apparent sexual coercion of the women in question; where the law now prioritised questions of consent and sexual agency over property concerns when examining accusations of sexual assault, so do the playwrights when they portray the initial sexual encounter between man and ‘mistress’. Each play ostensibly portrays a rape, but the encounter is shrouded in ambiguity that raises questions concerning the woman’s agency or acquiescence. Although problematic to the modern eye, these scenes of sexual coercion are complicated by the response of the apparent survivors who then choose to engage in relationships with their assailants. This response was atypical for theatrical representations of rape, as I will demonstrate when I discuss traditional literary responses to rape that carefully categorised the women as virtuous or corrupted; the fact that the women characters I examine select not to follow these predetermined patterns of behaviour evinces a degree of agency on their part that is characteristic more of the modern ‘mistress’ than of the passive object of another’s desire in Petrarchan poetry. The ‘mistress’ is not only sexualised through the depiction of the man’s sexual approach coloured in the language of courtly love, but the playwrights’

adaptation of rape narratives which foreground questions of consent – as well as their rejection of traditional dramatic responses that safely categorise the survivor as victim or villain - allows for the women to evince sexual agency – a key characteristic of the modern ‘mistress’. These plays therefore develop the meaning of ‘mistress’ from its courtly version, characterised by passivity and lack of sexual consummation, to its modern form which includes a sexual component and the woman’s participation.

My analysis is indebted to “‘Best Men are Molded out of Faults’: Marrying the Rapist in Jacobean Drama’ (1984),⁹⁹ in which Suzanne Gossett describes an experiment in conventional rape narratives that occurs between 1617 and 1623. Several plays of this period allow for the survival of a character following her violation, a problematic innovation that Gossett believes is ultimately compromising to the woman in question and not altogether effective dramatically. By focusing on how the surviving victims are morally ‘compromised’ by their survival, however, she arguably neglects the potential of these women as subjects in their narrative, creatures of agency who resist their own destruction when it does not serve their own interests.

Subsequent research inspired by Gossett includes Deborah Burks’s 1995 analysis of *The Changeling*, in which she addresses the notion of ‘complicity’ in a woman’s rape and helpfully highlights the necessity for men to interpret women’s

⁹⁹ Suzanne Gossett, “‘Best Men are Molded out of Faults’ Marrying the Rapist in Jacobean Drama’, *English Literary Renaissance*, 14 (1984), pp. 305-327.

bodies in order to ascertain whether a rape has occurred¹⁰⁰ – an issue addressed also by Kim Solga (2000).¹⁰¹ However, I disagree with Burks’s contention that ‘women were not treated as autonomous individuals in the eyes of the law’ (Burks, p. 767); as I will demonstrate below, the emerging focus on consent in early modern rape law prioritised the actions and behaviour of women rather than perceiving them as damaged chattel belonging to a patriarch. Jocelyn Catty (1999) discusses the problematic matter of female passivity and agency, and I will expand upon her exploration of the unstable ‘boundary between seduction and rape’ (Catty, p. 63). Her analysis of royal mistresses in complaint literature is particularly inspiring, and I concur with her argument that ‘the woman’s status as a [rape] victim would be undermined by her living as the man’s mistress’ (Catty, p. 63).¹⁰² Karen Bamford (2000) elaborates on the disparate reactions of early modern women to violation. She observes that the vengeful rape victim was anathema to early modern conceptions of femininity, and she disputes Gossett’s assertion that the raped woman who marries her rapist is compromised – rather, she suggests, the rapist is redeemed by the marriage.¹⁰³ *Representing Rape* (2001) explores what representations of rape reveal about early modern attitudes toward women’s subjectivity and self-determination. As the editors make clear in their

¹⁰⁰ Deborah G. Burks, ‘“I’ll Want My Will Else”: “The Changeling” and Women’s Complicity with Their Rapists’, *ELH*, 62 (1995), pp. 759-90.

¹⁰¹ Kim Solga, ‘Rape’s Metatheatrical Return: Rehearsing Sexual Violence among the Early Moderns’, *Theatre Journal*, 58 (2000), pp. 53-72.

¹⁰² Jocelyn Catty, *Writing Rape, Writing Women in Early Modern England: Unbridled Speech* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999).

¹⁰³ Karen Bamford, *Sexual Violence on the Jacobean Stage* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p. 124.

introduction, ‘in its extremity, rape makes manifest the specifics of a given culture’s understanding of the female subject in society’.¹⁰⁴ Barbara Baines (2003) is less convincing on this issue, claiming that most early modern rape narratives portray the victimized women as effaced objects and the affected menfolk as proactive subjects.¹⁰⁵ Melissa Sanchez explores rape narratives in the context of larger debates concerning political tyranny and the responsibilities of a subject, examining the difficulty of representing agency that may be characterized as anarchic resistance to a social order or collusion in corruption.¹⁰⁶ This study is compelling but Sanchez’s primary focus is rape in a political context while my efforts are directed toward the personal. These analyses consistently focus on the early modern preoccupation with a woman’s behaviour *after* a rape and its importance in establishing a woman’s social role. However, none of these critics directly confronts the topic of the raped woman who becomes a ‘mistress’ on the early modern stage, an omission I seek to remedy in this chapter.

I will also engage with the field of early modern passions as represented on stage, touching on Gail Kern Paster’s study of female bodily control and of the ways in which ‘humoral theory was instrumental in the production and

¹⁰⁴ Elizabeth Robertson and Christine M. Rose, ‘Introduction’, in *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. by Elizabeth Robertson and Christine M. Rose (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 1-20 (p. 2).

¹⁰⁵ Barbara J. Baines, *Representing Rape in the English Early Modern Period* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003).

¹⁰⁶ Melissa E. Sanchez, *Erotic Subjects: The Sexuality of Politics in Early modern English Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

maintenance of gender and class difference'.¹⁰⁷ Ultimately, the ideological and biological assumption that women lack bodily self-control is the source of anxiety concerning whether or not a woman can be 'complicit' in her rape. I draw particular inspiration from Lesel Dawson's examination of emotion. Her work on the power dynamics of Neoplatonic literature proposes that lovesickness in women was embodied in a way it was not in men, allowing the desiring 'I' in Petrarchan and Neoplatonic poetry to be elevated through his lovesickness in a way that the unreasonable woman cannot because she is subjugated 'to her body's sexual demands'.¹⁰⁸ She disputes this paradigm while highlighting the fact that lovesickness is not about the beloved but about the lover, and I agree with her analysis of the perceived dangers of such courtly literature for the early modern imagination – namely, that some considered it a tool of seduction and a dangerous subversion of the gender hierarchy. I will expand on this idea in the following section, exploring the ways in which dramatists allude to or directly address how the supposedly courtly lover may harbour sexual intentions that can find expression through the dangerous subversion of courtly conventions.

Early modern theatrical criticism is thus engaged with the problematic nature of female agency, ranging from what rape narratives reveal about how women were understood as subjects in society and how she should respond to her circumstances, to how her biological existence was expected to affect her actions in a potentially dangerous manner. My reading adds another dimension to this

¹⁰⁷ Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 7.

¹⁰⁸ Lesel Dawson, *Lovesickness and Gender in Early Modern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p. 4

field by exploring the theatre's representation of female sexual agency which emerged from two forms of literature that apparently deprive her of this: rape narratives and Petrarchan poetry. This chapter will provide another angle on the commonalities and differences between these two forms of literature, demonstrating how their interaction can create new understandings of female sexuality on the early modern stage.

1. Sexualising the Courtly Mistress

I will demonstrate in this section how the playwrights utilise the language and tropes of courtly love, as evident in Petrarchan poetry and its English imitators, in the interactions between the man and the woman who will become his sexual partner. These linguistic conventions evoke the 'mistress' of Petrarchan poetry before subverting the characterisation of Jane Shore, Bianca and Beatrice-Joanna as chaste, unattainable mistresses by having the men who employ such language express explicit sexual intent before sexually coercing the object of their 'ennobling' desire.

In *Edward IV*, the King struggles with his attraction to Jane Shore by alluding to her power over him:

A woman's aid, that hath more power than *France*

To crown us, or to kill us with mischance.

If chaste resolve be to such beauty tied,

Sue how thou canst, thou wilt be still denied (*1 Edward IV*,
16.154-7).

Edward may be the monarch, but a shopkeeper's wife possesses the power to 'crown' or 'kill' him, and he is forced into the position of unsuccessful suitor; such powerlessness is characteristic of the despairing courtly lover who desires but cannot enforce his chaste mistress's attentions. However, Heywood subverts these courtly conventions by his use of the conditional 'if' regarding her chastity, overtly signifying the lustful intentions that Edward acknowledges may be denied. The question for the audience becomes this: will he respect such denials? Edward's language becomes hyperbolic as he approaches Jane at the shop: 'Her radiant eyes dejected to the ground, / Would turn each pebble to a diamond (*I Edward IV*, 17.35-6). The imagery of this speech echoes that used in Petrarch's poetry:

Never before were seen such lovely eyes

[...]

Love leads it to the foot of that hard laurel

Whose branches are of diamond (ll. 19- 24).¹⁰⁹

Much like Petrarch's Laura, Jane is imagined in terms of precious jewels, the heat of the sun, and the transformative power of her eyes.

Although Edward is initially presented as a courtly lover desiring a chaste mistress in Jane Shore, his intentions become apparent when he importunes Jane to succumb to his sexual advances. In this speech, Heywood combines the language of the submissive, pleading courtly lover with that of royal command. By having Edward declare that '[h]is tongue entreats, controls the greatest peer; /

¹⁰⁹ Francesco Petrarca, *Petrarch in English*, ed. and trans. by Thomas P. Roche, pp. 257-8.

His hand plights love, a royal sceptre holds' (19.105), Heywood demonstrates how the most powerful man in England has been forced into a supplicant position, entreating the favour of a subject. However, this courtly abjection of the lover is subverted by the following lines: 'And in his heart he hath confirmed thy good; / Which may not, must not, shall not be withstood' (19.106-7). He refuses to be refused, insisting on her sexual acquiescence. By conflating the pleading lover with the sexual coercer, Heywood implicitly sexualises the courtly mistress.

Thomas Middleton's subversion of courtly language in *Women Beware Women* is more explicit than Heywood's; while the earlier playwright has Edward rhapsodise about Jane before approaching her, the Duke in Middleton's play utilises courtly tropes as a tool with which to coerce her sexually. Prominent within Petrarchan poetry is the imagery of imprisonment, with many a lover declaring himself a prisoner to his love from which only his mistress's pity or mercy can free him. For instance, Petrarch notes 'I sunk, of two bright eyes the prisoner' (*Petrarch in English*, p. 191), and the poem 'The despairing lover lamenteth' includes the following: 'And I in prison like to sterve' (ll. 27).¹¹⁰ The Duke employs the same imagery of imprisonment when he urges Bianca to '[s]trive not to seek / [Her] liberty and keep [him] still in prison' (2.2.328-9). One of Petrarch's poems interestingly includes suggestions of sexual coercion in its imagery of imprisonment: 'Fleeing the prison where Love had kept me for so many years to do what he willed with me, it would be long to tell you, Ladies,

¹¹⁰ 'The despairing lover lamenteth', in *Tottel's Miscellany: Songs and Sonnets of Henry Howard, Early of Surrey, Sir Thomas Wyatt and Others*, ed. by Amanda Holton and Tom MacFaul (London: Penguin Books, 2011), p. 242.

how much my new Liberty was irksome to me'.¹¹¹ Tellingly, it is the desiring lover (namely, the man) who is vulnerable to figurative violation rather than the woman he loves. Middleton's reversal of such imagery shows how the emotional imprisonment of the lover is subverted by a sexually aggressive man, one who rejects this condition in favour of depriving the object of his desire of her own 'liberty'. The Duke continues in this vein:

I affect

A passionate pleading 'bove an easy yielding,

But never pitied any – they deserve none-

That will not pity me' (ll. 358-61).

'Pity' appears with considerable frequency in Petrarch's poetry, an example of which is as follows: 'I fear I shall change my face and my locks before she with true pity will show me her eyes' (*Petrarch's Lyric Poems*, p. 88). It also recurs in early modern interpretations of Petrarchan poetry, as in 'The despairing lover' and Edmund Spenser's adaptation of a Petrarchan poem which includes the line '[f]or pitie and loue my heart yet burnes in paine' (*Petrarch in English*, p. 124). The Duke again reverses the traditional application of such imagery (with the suffering or imprisoned lover desperate for his mistress's pity) by having the desiring lover refuse to show pity to the woman he aggressively importunes.

Middleton continues to subvert the conventions of courtly love by having the Duke indulge in the hyperbole of the literary genre even after sex. When the

¹¹¹ Francesco Petrarca, *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The Rime sparse and Other Lyrics*, trans. and ed. by Robert M. Durling (London: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 182.

Duke and Bianca appear together before the court after his assault he refers to her as follows:

Methinks there is no spirit amongst us, gallants,

But what divinely sparkles from the eyes

Of bright Bianca; we sat all in darkness

But for that splendour (*Women Beware Women*, III.2.99-102).

The poem 'Descripcion and praise of his love' evokes the same Petrarchan conceit of the mistress bringing light to darkness:

Under the bent of her browes justly pight:

As Diamondes, or Saphires at the least:

Her glistering lightes the darknesse of the night' (ll.8-10).¹¹²

The familiar emphasis on the power of the courtly mistress's eyes and her divine elevation above the lover reveals such terminology to be characteristic of Petrarchan poetry, but here it is used to refer to a married woman with whom the Duke is having a sexual relationship. Such language and imagery clearly frame Bianca as a 'courtly mistress', as they did before the sexual encounter, but the reality of the Duke and Bianca's sexual relationship transforms this understanding of 'mistress'. Middleton compounds this interpretive shift by following this courtly praise of Bianca with a conversation between the couple in which they

¹¹² 'Descripcion and praise of his love', in *Tottel's Miscellany: Songs and Sonnets of Henry Howard, Early of Surrey, Sir Thomas Wyatt and Others*, ed. by Holton and MacFaul, p. 243.

discuss sexual matters in a decidedly uncourtly tone. Referring to the Ward and Isabella's impending marriage, the couple converse as follows:

DUKE: I thought he would have married her by attorney,
And lain with her so too.

BIANCA: Nay, my kind lord,
There's very seldom any found so foolish
To give away his part there (3.2.223-6).

This conversation reveals the mutuality and familiarity that characterises the Duke and Bianca's relationship, again demonstrating how the courtly understanding of 'mistress' is undergoing a transformation; no longer the chaste and aloof object of veneration, the 'mistress' the Duke pursues and obtains is a sexual partner.

Unlike in the other two plays, Middleton's representation of the central relationship in *The Changeling* is complicated by the fact that it includes another meaning of 'mistress' beyond its courtly incarnation – namely, the feminine form of master. Beatrice-Joanna is the socially superior 'mistress' of her servant De Flores, allowing Middleton to play with the ambiguity in the term's usage. More importantly for my analysis, this social disparity reflects the emotional disparity of Petrarchan poetry in that De Flores is subjugated by his feelings for Beatrice-Joanna as well as by his position as her servant. His apparently courtly subservience is exacerbated by her literal authority over him in the household, making the emotional and social reversal of their relationship through his sexual advances even more impactful as it transforms the courtly conception of the

chaste, superior mistress into a debased sexual partner. In his first aside, De Flores establishes his credentials as a courtly lover in the Petrarchan mode:

Will't never mend, this scorn,

One side nor to her? Must I be enjoined

To follow still whilst she fled from me?' (*The Changeling*,
I.1.100-102).¹¹³

References to fleeing permeate Petrarchan poetry but they are often used in reference to the lover fleeing or attempting to flee from his love or mistress. One example can be found in Henry Howard's poetry:

And if I flee, I cary with me still

The venomd shaft, which doth hus force restore

By haste of flight' (ll.47-9).¹¹⁴

Middleton's reversal of this tradition establishes his pattern of subverting traditional Petrarchan conventions, an approach similarly adopted in some of Wyatt's poetry. The use of 'scorn' is more traditional: 'For of thy hope no frute apperes, / Thy true meanyng is paide with scorne,' (ll.22-3).¹¹⁵ However, De

¹¹³ Thomas Middleton, *The Changeling*, ed. by Douglas Bruster, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, gen. eds. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 1632-1678 (p. 1639).

¹¹⁴ Henry Howard, 'Description of the restless state of a lover, with sute to hus ladie, to rue on his dying hart', in *Tottel's Miscellany: Songs and Sonnets of Henry Howard, Early of Surrey, Sir Thomas Wyatt and Others*, ed. by Holton and MacFaul, pp. 6-7.

¹¹⁵ 'The lover in dispeire lamenteth his case', in *Tottel's Miscellany: Songs and Sonnets of Henry Howard, Early of Surrey, Sir Thomas Wyatt and Others*, ed. by Holton and MacFaul, p. 302.

Flores's supposed courtly adoration is consistently sexualised by the character, most notably by the recurring use of 'service': 'True service merits mercy' (*The Changeling*, II.1.63); 'I would but wish the honour of a service / So happy as that mounts to' (II.2.97-8); 'It's a service that I kneel for to you' (II.2.118). De Flores's repetition of this word emphasises its multiplicity of meaning; an appropriate word in the mouth of a servant and a courtly lover, it nevertheless contains sexual overtones that perfectly reflects De Flores complicated relationship to his 'mistress'. The hope for the 'courtly mistress's' 'mercy' is another familiar trope that ranges from poetry to ballads, and the abased posture of a kneeling supplicant is appropriate in both a servant and courtly lover. The word 'mounts', however, is implicitly sexual.

De Flores's sexualisation of courtly language is assisted by Middleton's portrayal of the early interactions between De Flores and Beatrice-Joanna. Beatrice-Joanna drops her glove as she notices De Flores's continued presence: 'Not this serpent gone yet?' (I.1.229). Depending on performance, this act could be perceived as deliberate and thus an implicit acknowledgement of his 'love-service'. The bestowal of a lady's favour is a common ritual in literature and courtly games and the glove is often utilised in this vein. In *The Art of Courtly Love* the Countess of Champagne identifies gloves as a gift 'proper for ladies to accept from their lovers' (Capellanus, p. 176). Diana O' Hara also notes that '[t]he giving of gloves' may have particular significance as 'an embodiment of handfast or the challenge of the gauntlet [which was] among those objects which also had a decorative function and could serve as accoutrements in wedding attire' (O' Hara, p. 84). When De Flores attempts to return the 'accidentally' fallen glove, Beatrice-Joanna responds with an overt disgust that nevertheless

results in her deliberately – if violently – gifting De Flores with its pair. Such an act suggests complicity. De Flores certainly recognises the gloves as a favour from his ‘courtly mistress’ before immediately subverting this convention by aggressively sexualising it:

Here’s a favour come with a mischief!

Now I know she had rather wear my pelt tanned

In a pair of dancing pumps than I should thrust

My fingers into her sockets here.’ (1.1.235-8).

With Beatrice-Joanna’s implicit complicity, De Flores actively transforms his ‘courtly mistress’ into a sexualised one.

This debasement of the ‘courtly mistress’ through crude sexualisation of its imagery and conventions is not De Flores’s only tactic. He quite seriously argues that there is actually a social parity between Beatrice-Joanna and himself: ‘Though my hard fate has thrust me out to servitude, / I tumbled into th’world a gentleman’ (II.1.48-9). This contention undermines the notion of the ‘courtly mistress’ as a superior, noble lady that the desiring lover can never attain, and De Flores continues in this vein when he later argues with Beatrice-Joanna that her moral debasement has superseded her superior social standing and thus rendered her his equal. I will expand on this element in a later section, but De Flores’ attempts to subvert the idea of the ‘courtly mistress’ pave the way for his eventual insistence that Beatrice-Joanna succumb to his advances. Middleton thus consistently undermines and subverts the early modern conception of the ‘courtly mistress’, with both the sexualisation of its meaning and the emphasis on parity

throughout these early scenes serving to alter the audience's understanding of the word 'mistress'.

In this section I have examined how three male characters express their interest in a reluctant woman utilising the familiar imagery and linguistic conventions of the courtly lover as embodied in Petrarchan poetry. Their use of such language when addressing or referring to the object of their desire initially frames said object as a 'courtly mistress', but the playwrights subvert these literary conventions and thus the traditional understanding of the 'courtly mistress' through their depiction of the male characters' aggressively sexual intentions. Their intentions and efforts to ensure female submission undermine the pretensions of courtly literature which insist on the chastity of the 'courtly mistress' and her lover's respectful veneration of her; as a result, the early modern audience is compelled to view the 'courtly mistress' as irrevocably sexualised. This shift in understanding is initiated by the apparently one-sided sexual intentions of the male characters, but the dramatists develop this conceptual transformation of the 'courtly mistress' into the 'sexual mistress' through their portrayal of sexual coercion. I argue that the representation of the initial sexual encounter between the woman and her pursuer is intentionally ambiguous in these plays, placing specific significance on the woman's response to her apparent violation in a manner that reflects the emerging importance of female sexual agency in legal rape narratives of the period. These characters choose to engage in a relationship with their pursuers, evincing agency that problematises rape narratives but clearly establishes these characters as active participants in their relationships; this dramatic approach counters courtly literature which requires the 'mistress' to be a passive object of another's desire. As such, the passive 'courtly

mistress' is transformed by these playwrights into an active sexual partner in a way that looks forward to the modern meaning of 'mistress'.

2. a) Prioritising Consent in Early Modern Rape Law

Essential to the modern understanding of 'mistress' is reciprocity, the woman's willingness to engage in an extra-marital sexual relationship with a man. This willingness can be characterised as sexual agency, something that the 'courtly mistress' rarely demonstrates in Petrarchan poetry and is not required to do so. I have explored how Jane, Bianca and Beatrice-Joanna were sexually pursued, and now I will illustrate how each woman evinces sexual agency in choosing to remain with the man who apparently attacks her. This expression of sexual agency occurs through portrayals of sexual coercion, a dramatic choice that reflected the developing understanding of rape law in early modern England. I will therefore begin this section with a brief analysis of rape law in this period, revealing how the understanding of what constituted rape shifted and legal narratives increasingly focused on questions of consent. This developing interest in women's sexual agency meant that a rape survivor was required to perform in a specific manner during and following her violation that signifies her innocence. These questions over female consent and the necessity to perform accentuates the interpretive ambiguity that surrounds rape, usually an unwitnessed act that must be proven to an audience. The focus thus becomes the attacked woman, specifically how she exercises choice as demonstrated in her subsequent behaviour. The twin focus in legal narratives on female sexual agency and performance allows playwrights to explore how a woman may demonstrate sexual

agency in choosing to remain with her attacker and therefore become his ‘mistress’ in its modern meaning.

Matthew Hale defined rape as ‘the carnal knowledge of any woman above the age of ten years against her will, and of a woman-child under the age of ten years with or against her will.’¹¹⁶ This is fairly unambiguous, but there was an earlier historical understanding of rape and the laws that should govern it that could not be easily displaced by Hale’s clarification. Thomas Edgar (1632) elaborates on the dual meanings of rape:

There are two kindes of Rape, of which though the [one] be called by the com[mon] people, and by the Law itselſe, Rauishment; yet in my conceit it borroweth the name *from r[a]pere*, but vnproperly, for it is no more but *Species stup[ri]*, a hideous hatefull kinde of whoredome in him which committeth it, when a wom[a]n is enforced violently to sustaine the furie of brutish conc[u]piscence: but she is left where she is found, as in her owne house or bed, as *Lucrece* was, and not hurried away, as *Helen by Paris*, or as the Sabine women were by the Romans.¹¹⁷

These literary exemplars emphasize the disparity in experiences that may be encapsulated under the title of ‘rape’ or ‘ravishment’, ranging from simple abduction to forcible intercourse. They were nevertheless conflated in earlier legal works such as Anthony Fitzherbert’s 1538 text which combines multiple statutes in its section ‘Statutes ageinst Ravishours of wimen’, beginning with a specific discussion of ravishment or rape before describing the punishment for abduction:

¹¹⁶ Matthew Hale, *Historia Placitorum Coronae*, 2 vols (London: 1736), I (p. 628).

¹¹⁷ Thomas Edgar, *The Lawes Resolutions of Women’s Rights* (London: 1632), p. 377-8/ Bb5^r-Bb6^v.

‘what person taketh any woman agaynste her will, mayden, wydowe, or wife, suche taking / procuryng / or abbetynge to the same [...] be felonie. And suche takers [...] be [adjudged] as pryncypall [felon]’.¹¹⁸ What unites these two forms of ‘rape’ is the threat they both pose to a patriarchal, patrilineal society, a society which functioned chiefly through the homosocial exchange of women.¹¹⁹

As Mark Breitenberg has observed, ‘the masculine discourse demanding sexual chastity in women is always additionally shaped by an anxiety about the preservation or pollution of an ideal of class purity’ (Breitenberg, p. 70). Only by ensuring the chastity of women may members of the early modern community ensure the legitimacy of the offspring who will inherit the patriarch’s name and property; only by ensuring the chastity of women may husbands maintain their reputations within the community. Abduction, elopement, and forcible intercourse all cast doubt on the sexual purity of an unmarried woman, in addition to robbing her male relations of their prerogative to utilize the female members of their family as a means to forge useful marital alliances. The rape of a married woman dishonours her husband, illegitimately appropriating his conjugal rights and casting doubt on the legitimacy of any subsequent children. It is therefore possible to elide the different definitions of ‘rape’ under the same title, for they all encapsulate a crime against male sexual rights over their women.

The inclusion of both ‘abduction’ and ‘brutal concupiscence’ under the title of ‘rape’ is also apparent in earlier English legal statutes. Earlier laws were

¹¹⁸ Sir Anthony Fitzherbert, *The newe boke of iustices of peas* (London: 1538), fol. 86^r.

¹¹⁹ See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, ed. by Rodney Needham, trans. by James Harle Bell, John Richard von Sturmer, and Rodney Needham (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1969), p. 115.

created principally to protect the rights of men to bestow their female ‘property’ as they saw fit, with the Statute of 1385 making rape a felony and depriving a woman of her earlier legal right to rescue her rapist from mutilation and/or death by demanding him as a husband:

Hereby the auncient law concerning the election given to her that is ravished is taken away [...] a greater punishment is inflicted upon the party ravished, if she after consent to the ravisher, viz. that as well the ravished as the ravisher should be disabled to challenge inheritance, dower, or joynt-feoffement.¹²⁰

Similar concerns over property appear in Fitzherbert’s 1538 text. The primary concern of this law is with property: whereas previously a woman was allowed a degree of agency in choosing to wed her rapist and thus rehabilitate them both, the 1385 statute effaced this agency in favour of preserving the male prerogative over women’s bodies as objects of exchange. Charges of rape could even be brought against participants in clandestine marriages, demonstrating that a woman’s consent was immaterial if it deprived a male relative of his right to bestow her in marriage as he pleased. Early rape laws thus protected the rights of the patriarch, and it was men who in the ancient and medieval eras sought legal redress for the rape of their women.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Sir Edward Coke, *The Second Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England* (New Jersey: The Lawbook Exchange, 2002), p. 433.

¹²¹ Elizabeth Robertson, ‘Public Bodies and Psychic Domains: Rape, Consent, and Female Subjectivity in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*’, in *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, edited by Elizabeth Robertson and Christine M. Rose, The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 281-310 (p. 284).

However, as noted by Burks and Bashar, the laws of rape underwent some alteration during the latter half of the sixteenth century. This alteration may be seen in the 1554 edition of Fitzherbert's text: 'Rape, which is to raiſhe a woman againſt her wyll, and thefore ye ſhal enquire of them [who] raiſhe any woman married, mayde, or other woman, where ſhe did not aſſent before, for though ſhe conſent after [...] yet is it felony'. This is followed by a ſeparate conſideration of 'Takers of women againſt their wyll.': 'Moreouer ye that enquire of them [who] take any woman againſte her wyl, whether ſhe be mayde, wife, or widowe, al ſuch takers [...] ſhalbe adiudged principal felons'.¹²² The ſtatutes of 1555 and 1597 officially diſtinguiſhed ſuppoſed abduction (a crime againſt male property rights) from forcible intercourse (a 'crime againſt the perſon'),¹²³ illuſtrating how 'the crimes of forced coitus and abduction tended to be treated ſeparately, and the definition of rape was increasingly refined away from the ambiguous language of Westminster II'.¹²⁴ John Cowell reflects this ideological ſhift when he defines rape as 'a felony com|mitted by a man in the violent deflowring of a woman, be ſhee ould, or young: [...] carnall know|ledge had of a woman, who ne|uer conſented thereunto before the fact, nor after.'¹²⁵ *The Countrey Juſtice* (1630) clarifies this further with a definition of rape that prioritises the woman's conſent

¹²² Sir Anthony Fitzherbert, *The nevv boke of iuſtices of peace* (London: 1554), fol. 113^v- 113^r / P1^v - P1^r.

¹²³ Nazife Baſhar, 'Rape in England between 1550 and 1700', in *The Sexual Dynamics of History: Men's Power, Women's Reſiſtance* (London: Feminist History Collective, 1983), pp. 28-42 (p. 41).

¹²⁴ Amy Greenſtadt, ' "Rapt from Himſelf": Rape and the Poetics of Corporality in Sidney's *Old Arcadia*', in *Representing Rape*, ed. by Robertson and Rose, pp. 311-352 (p. 343).

¹²⁵ John Cowell, *The Interpreter* (Cambridge: 1607), Hhh3^v.

over property concerns.¹²⁶ Ostensibly no longer a matter of male property rights, rape was all about a woman's sexual agency.

The concept of consent was not new to the early modern period, but, as Miranda Chaytor notes, 'its status was weak, in that what was determined by the victim's consent was not *whether* a rape had been committed but *in whose name* the prosecution was brought'.¹²⁷ The legal history of rape incorporated abduction and, to an extent, elopement within its definition, and since the law tended to focus on compensating the abused patriarch for his loss, 'consent was necessarily a peripheral concept' (Chaytor, p. 396). This emerging focus on consent as a crucial factor in ascertaining whether a rape has occurred (and how it should be punished) inevitably turned the spotlight on the woman in question. With consent becoming a primary factor in interpreting rape, the woman's testimony becomes far more significant 'but, in legal practice, increasingly suspect'.¹²⁸ Imaginatively and culturally, as demonstrated by Edgar's text, the dual meaning of rape remained.¹²⁹ Legally, as demonstrated by Dalton and Hale's definitions, the determining factor in interpreting (and punishing) rape was now the question of consent, which encouraged minute examination of a woman's conduct both before and after her assault.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Michael Dalton, *The countrey iustice* (London, 1630), p. 281/ Bb3^r.

¹²⁷ Miranda Chaytor, 'Husband{ry}: Narratives of Rape in the Seventeenth Century', *Gender and History*, 7 (1995), 378-407 (p. 396).

¹²⁸ Baines, pp. 8-9.

¹²⁹ Jocelyn Catty, *Writing Rape, Writing Women in Early Modern England: Unbridled Speech* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p. 12.

¹³⁰ Baines, p. 4.

With consent now the decisive factor in legal definitions of rape, the survivor's words and behaviour were paramount. It is this reason why female speech and actions prior, during, and following an attack came to be scrutinized. The woman was required to provide testimony – both verbal and non-verbal – to authorities that convinced them that she had been the victim of another's lust, not his accomplice. As I will now demonstrate, these legal developments placed women's agency centre stage and required women to 'perform' their sexual violation in the manner of theatrical rape survivors. Whereas before she could be little more than passive chattel in the eyes of the law, the rape survivor was now scrutinized as a woman capable of sexual agency.

b) Women's Testimony and Performing Rape

The problematic dependence on a woman's testimony in the demonstration that a rape had taken place inspired a section in *The Lawes and Resolutions of Womens Rights*, essentially providing an instruction manual for the rape victim who intends to publicize her violation and seek redress: '[S]he ought to goe straight way, [...] and with [H]ue and Cry complaine to the good men of the next town, shewing her wrong her garments torne' (Edgar, p. 393). This advice clearly demonstrates the importance of the woman's behaviour *after* the rape, identifying specific actions that a victim is obliged to *perform* if she is to be credible; only after she has performed for her audience of reliable male witnesses may she then alert the relevant authorities. The legal significance of a woman's behaviour following her assault can even be seen in *The Interpreter* when Cowell observes that rape 'in Scotland ought to be complained of the same day, or night that the crime is committed'. The importance of the woman's behaviour *after* the fact,

specifically the need for her to *perform* a certain text and fulfil a particular role, was reflected in standard dramatic practice, as I will demonstrate below.

Rape is an epistemological void, an act (presumably) unwitnessed which is not visible to the outside eye. The survivor faces considerable challenges in pursuing legal action against her rapist, not least the cultural assumption that male testimony is intrinsically more reliable than a woman - particularly one who has been sexually compromised. Bernard Capp declares that '[t]he law provided a fourth prop for male superiority, both in principle and practice', before also noting that '[a] man's word carried more weight than a woman's in any court hearing, and the word 'testimony' was indeed derived from *testis*'.¹³¹ Hale revealingly states that although 'true rape is a most detestable crime [...] it must be remembered, that it is an accusation easily to be made and hard to be proved' (Hale, p. 635). Consequently, the female victim was placed at a disadvantage that she had to overcome.

In order for a survivor to convince others that she was attacked, she must provide her audience of witnesses with unambiguous signifiers that reveal what has occurred privately and internally. She is obliged to perform the rape before witnesses, transforming her body into an unambiguous signifier of violated chastity that can be read and thus inspire action. The problem, as Kim Solga recognises, is when this 'performance' changes from an accepted and understood system of signifiers that conveys the unknowable to an overly self-conscious recitation of signs that seem divorced from their meaning or merely 'self-

¹³¹ Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 5.

referential' (Solga, p. 62). As mentioned above, the recent onus on consent in early modern legal practice required the woman's testimony – both verbal and physical – to be scrutinized with greater intensity and balanced against the intrinsically more reliable word of a man. She must conform to all acceptable perceptions of wronged womanhood, roles created for and by men in service of maintaining their patrilineal, patriarchal society. It is here, however, that she confronts the first of many paradoxes facing the rape victim.

Burks observes that 'English law had two contradictory responses to women. On the one hand, [...] it attempted to hold them ever more closely accountable for their actions. Simultaneously, however, it viewed them as incapable of managing their own affairs'.¹³² Such tensions are patent in surviving court records, or legal rape narratives, and Cristine M. Varholý expands on Burks's work by exploring how women defended themselves against accusations of sexual misconduct at Bridewell court.¹³³ Both scholars succinctly summarise the difficulty that an early modern women faced when navigating the conflicting understandings of female sexual behaviour in a legal setting, and these navigations reveal a specific duality which recurs in women's accounts of rape: for instance, the raped woman must convince others that she resisted the advances of her rapist and thus registered her non-consent; however, her resistance must not be so forceful that her audience perceives it as 'unfeminine' – that is, not in

¹³² Deborah G. Burks, "I'll Want My Will Else": *The Changeling* and Women's Complicity with Their Rapists', *ELH*, 62 (1995), pp. 759-790 (p. 767).

¹³³ Cristine M. Varholý, ' "But she woulde not consent": Women's Narratives of Sexual Assault and Compulsion in Early Modern London', in *Violence, Politics, and Gender in Early Modern England*, ed. by Joseph P. Ward (2008), pp. 41-65 (p. 61).

accordance with the early modern patriarchal ideal of passive, submissive womanhood. Any behaviour, including violent resistance to rape, that does not register as sufficiently 'feminine' would suggest that the woman exhibiting such behaviour would be capable of similarly 'unfeminine' conduct, including consenting to extra-marital sexual relations and subsequently claiming rape in an effort to conceal her wanton disorderly conduct.

The result of this paradox was that a rape victim needed carefully to consider her account of the rape; she must balance the necessary resistance to assault that demonstrates that she did not consent with the passivity that was appropriately 'female' and therefore unthreatening to misogynist society.¹³⁴

Elizabeth Sansbury's account of her rape in 1614 is quite effective in balancing these dual needs of active resistance and virtuous femininity:

I thinking to escape from him did run upp a paire of staires in the howse to gett into a chamber and locke myself therein but [Sir John Lawrence] followed me [...] thereupon I cried out but he stopped my mouth and there had carnal knowledge of me against my will.¹³⁵

She flees his advances and cries for help, all signifying her resistance, but she is not violent and thus unfeminine. The premise is that if the raped woman evinces one brand of 'unfeminine' behaviour (aggression), then it is likely that she has demonstrated another form of similarly 'unfeminine' conduct (promiscuity). The

¹³⁴ Catty, p. 18.

¹³⁵ Records of the Court of Star Chamber and of other courts 8 199/20, m. 171, Answer of Elizabeth Sansbury [Middlesex, 1614], quoted in Walker, 'Rereading Rape', p. 15.

violated woman is thus confronted with constant paradoxes. How, then, is a woman to prove her chastity? The answer may be found on the stage.

A woman's sexual agency was forefront in early modern rape narratives. She was expected to react in a particular fashion in order to prove her innocence and victimisation, essentially providing a performance of violated chastity that male authorities can read and accurately interpret. This onus on a woman's performance, necessary for an audience to understand what transpired offstage, was inevitably reflected in early modern theatrical depictions of rape and its aftermath. Jeremy Lopez suggests that 'the limitations of the early modern stage' and the potential failure of theatrical conventions 'was a constant and vital part of audiences' experience of the play'.¹³⁶ This is especially true in performances of rape, where the audience substitutes for a magistrate determining whether or not an act of rape occurred. Consequently, the subsequent behaviour of the rape victim is given greater weight than if the unstageable could be staged and rendered unambiguous, lending even more significance to the woman's behaviour and choices that follow. As a de facto judge of the characters in this context, the audience becomes part of the cultural process that is the transformation of these survivors into sexual partners, while the dramatists' awareness of this audience engagement largely explains why they found such dramatic value in depicting rape.

In the next section I will examine the scenes of sexual coercion in *Edward IV*, *Women Beware Women* and *The Changeling* in closer detail, illustrating how

¹³⁶ Jeremy Lopez, *Theatrical Convention and Audience Response in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) p. 2.

the playwrights infuse considerable ambiguity into the scenes which necessarily raises questions over the female character's sexual agency. This agency finds fuller expression following the initial sexual encounter, as the survivor rejects dramatic conventions that all other stage representations of rape victims obey, instead choosing to remain in a relationship with her assailant. In choosing a sexual relationship outside the confines of marriage, these three women evince the sexual agency of the modern 'mistress' who requires mutuality in her relationship.

3. Ambiguity in Scenes of Sexual Coercion

a) *Edward IV*

In the earlier section exploring the King's corruption of the traditional courtly language when addressing Jane Shore, I referenced how his use of 'must' and 'shall' convey the command that lies behind his pretty persuasions. This power to command, and his willingness to employ it should Jane prove reluctant, is the principal signifier that this is a sexual coercion scene; whatever misgivings Jane possesses or however long she resists, the king's desire will ultimately be fulfilled. As Richard Danson Brown suggests, '*Edward IV*, Part 1, dramatizes the seduction as an aggressive display of royal power to which the commoner must submit'.¹³⁷ Jane recognises the imperative creeping into the king's speech, and presents him with a conditional surrender: 'If you enforce me, I have nought to

¹³⁷ Richard Danson Brown, "'A Talkative Wench (Whose Words a World Hath Delighted in)': Mistress Shore and Elizabethan Complaint', *Review of English Studies* 49 (1998), pp. 395-415 (p. 407).

say; / But wish I had not lived to see this day' (*1 Edward IV*, 19.108-9).

Revealingly, Edward responds to her unhappy submission with a quick dismissive speech that focuses on practicalities and thus indicates his preoccupation with achieving his own desires, not the unhappiness of his paramour. Obviously he is not concerned that his sexual partner be an enthusiastic or willing participant, but Jane's capitulation is sufficiently conditional to cast doubt on whether this is a 'rape'. It may be alternatively characterised as sexual and social submission to a man who is frighteningly persistent.

However, Heywood accentuates the ambiguity of this scene through his portrayal of Jane and Edward's earlier encounters, suggesting a degree of flirtatiousness and complicity on Jane's behalf that renders her reluctance to his overt proposition less convincing to an early modern audience. Although the playwright presents her as initially unaware of the effect she has had upon the king after their introduction at a mayoral feast, he soon reveals himself at her husband's shop and their conversation is intriguing:

KING: You'll not be offered fairlier, I believe.

JANE: Indeed, you offer like a gentleman,

But yet the jewel will not so be left (*1 Edward IV*, 17.106-8).

She willingly adopts the king's metaphorical language, equating her honour with her husband's wares, and does not desist once she recognizes him. Her adoption of this pattern of speech, which may have been excused in one who is negotiating with an unknown customer, becomes a symbol of complicity once she is aware of Edward's identity and his specific intentions.

Compromisingly, Jane continues to indulge in this shared innuendo once her husband arrives on stage, and as such she allows him to join in with their banter unwittingly: ‘Sir, if you bid not too much under-foot, / I’ll drive the bargain ’twixt you and my wife’ (*I Edward IV*, 17.109-10). Matthew Shore has unintentionally presented himself as a pander and ‘wittol’ (a willing cuckold) in this negotiation, and this is arguably Jane’s fault for not ending her coded exchange with the King that allows Shore to misinterpret what he hears. Edward responds to Shore’s words with a brief aside acknowledging the husband’s ignorant confusion, but Jane remains silent, evincing no discomfort with the misunderstanding. Worse still, however, is her subsequent deceit: ‘SHORE: Know you the gentleman? / JANE: Not I, sweetheart. Alas, why do you ask? (*I Edward IV*, 17.119-20). Jane continues to profess ignorance as to her customer’s identity, even contradicting her husband after the king’s reappearance: ‘You are deceived, sweetheart; ’tis not the King. / Think you he would adventure thus, alone?’ (*I Edward IV*, 17.144-5). She thus signifies to the audience a degree of cunning in her behaviour, an inclination to protect her suitor from her husband that suggests that she is not entirely averse to Edward’s intentions – or at least his *attentions*. This behaviour, although not excusing the King’s forceful attempts on her chastity, does nonetheless signify to the audience Jane’s capacity for independence, a willingness to engage in socially suspect behaviour that would not appeal to the patriarchal community. To an audience increasingly aware of the significance of female sexual agency in determining whether a rape has occurred, Jane’s conduct does not evince the pattern of virtuous resistance to male overtures that one would hope for from a rape victim.

b) *Women Beware Women*

Edward's IV's coercion is marked by repeated approaches to Jane Shore and the subtle abuse of power; the Duke's 'seduction' of Bianca in *Women Beware Women* is immediate and uncomfortably forceful: 'I should be sorry the least force should lay / An unkind touch upon thee (*Women Beware Women*, II.2.343-344). Much like Jane, Bianca counters the Duke's advances with mention of her husband, prompting the Duke's pragmatic suggestion that she '[t]ake a friend to him' (347). This language echoes that of Tarquin's in Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece*, thus signalling to the audience that this encounter should be considered a rape narrative.¹³⁸ The Duke further clarifies that he 'can command' (II.2.361), inspiring critical debate over whether the dramatist is depicting a seduction or a rape - a debate in which critics' interpretations are influenced by the time period in which they are writing. Gossett declares that '[c]ritics who have treated Bianca's fall as a seduction are wrong', stating that '[i]f this is not rape, it is certainly sexual mastery rather than sexual persuasion' (Gossett, p. 319). Alternatively, Irving Ribner asserts that Bianca's protestations are 'feeble' and the entire encounter 'is an elaborate game'.¹³⁹ Such ambiguity demonstrates that Bianca's 'rape' could easily be interpreted as a seduction and indeed theatrical performances may favour such an interpretation. One of the central reasons why this scene is considered ambiguous, despite being more forceful than the

¹³⁸ William Shakespeare, 'The Rape of Lucrece', in *William Shakespeare: The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. by Colin Burrow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 237-338 (p. 272).

¹³⁹ Irving Ribner, *Jacobean Tragedy: the quest for moral order* (London: Methuen, 1962), p. 144.

encounter between Jane Shore and Edward IV, concerns Bianca's elopement with Leantio.

In contrast to the relative domestic contentment depicted in *1 Edward IV*, the marriage of Bianca and Leantio in *Women Beware Women* is marked by controversy. Gossett draws this comparison between the Duke's 'sexual mastery' and Leantio's seduction:

Bianca was seduced by Leantio; rather like Desdemona, she consented to her lover's arguments and ran away from home, family, and state to be with him.

This constituted theft, as Leantio repeatedly says; the law would call it abduction (Gossett, p. 319).

As I argued earlier, the early modern legal understanding of rape had undergone an alteration which distinguished between abduction and non-consensual sex. However, this process was ongoing and an audience would be aware that Leantio's 'abduction' of Bianca would be considered a rape just decades earlier. Jocelyn Catty observes that '[t]his definition of 'rape' as 'abduction' is still available in the early modern period', its 'coexistence' with its alternative meaning of 'violation' accounting 'for much of the complexity surrounding the issue of rape' (Catty, p. 12). Consequently, Bianca's elopement with Leantio may be characterized as another rape, although one that offends not so much against Bianca's body as against the privilege of her family to bestow their daughter upon the suitor of their choice.

In the very first scene, Leantio is careful to mention Bianca's consent to her 'rape': 'From Venice her consent and I have brought her, / From parents great in wealth, more now in rage' (*Women Beware Women*, I.1.49-50). Bianca's

evident consent makes her abduction palatable to a modern audience, but the early modern attachment to parental approval in the matches of noble children is not entirely omitted from Leantio's account, for he concludes by swearing his mother to silence: 'If it be known, I have lost her' (47). His mother also expresses concern, perceiving his actions as an assault to Bianca's prospects and position: 'What ableness have you to do her right then / In maintenance fitting her birth and virtues?' (I.1.65-66). Leantio's mother is subsequently reassured by Bianca's avowal of her choice: 'I have forsook friends, fortunes, and my country, / And hourly I rejoice in't (131-2). However, these comments have resonance for the play for they present Bianca as having been already complicit in a 'rape', and specifically a 'rape' that strikes at the core values of the society in which she lived. She has preferred her personal interests and preferences before those of her family, an action she repeats when faced with what to do after her encounter with the Duke, and her complicity in one 'rape' renders her resistance to a subsequent one immediately suspect.

c) *The Changeling*

Unlike Jane Shore and Bianca, both victims of royal or aristocratic prerogative, *The Changeling's* Beatrice-Joanna is not (initially) socially vulnerable to her attacker. Moreover, she unwittingly exposes herself to De Flores's unwelcome advances when she enlists the aid of her father's unattractive servant to dispatch her betrothed. Their murderous pact is established when she promises him that his 'reward shall be precious' (II.2.131) and De Flores responds that he 'know[s] it will be precious: the thought ravishes' (133). He thus introduces the notion of ravishment, the form of payment he intends to take from Beatrice-Joanna against her will and (currently) against her knowledge. Bearing

the severed finger of Alonzo de Piracquo, De Flores dashes Beatrice-Joanna's hopes that after the murder he will flee the country and her company. He refuses her money and kisses her, declaring the following: 'Nor is it fit we two engaged so jointly / Should part and live asunder' (III.4.91-2). Beatrice-Joanna protests vociferously to De Flores's demand for sex, offering him all her wealth so long as she may 'go poor unto [her] bed with honour' (158). De Flores insists on her acquiescence, blackmailing her with her complicity in Alonzo's murder and the threat that a confession from De Flores would deprive her of her beloved Alsemero: 'If I enjoy thee not, thou ne'er enjoys; / I'll blast the hopes and joys of marriage' (147-9). He remains obdurate, and Beatrice-Joanna eventually accompanies him offstage in silence to repay her debt.

This scene has invited a multitude of critical readings which discuss the fraught question of whether De Flores has actually raped Beatrice-Joanna. John Stachniewski proposed that Beatrice-Joanna's fall should be read through the lens of Middleton's Calvinist beliefs; accordingly, Beatrice-Joanna's gradual corruption throughout the play is symptomatic of her spiritual condition.¹⁴⁰ Her complicity in the act of murder has explicitly identified her as a reprobate like De Flores, a fact that she herself can not shy away from: 'Was my creation in the womb so cursed, / It must engender with a viper first?' (168-9) At this point she appears to accept that there is a spiritual inevitability to her sexual union with De Flores, a fatalistic acceptance that undermines the notion that De Flores rapes Beatrice-Joanna.

Although there is an undeniable Calvinist framework in *The Changeling*, it would

¹⁴⁰ John Stachniewski, 'Calvinist Psychology in Middleton's Tragedies', in *Three Jacobean Revenge Tragedies: A Casebook*, ed. by R. V. Holdsworth (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1990), pp. 226-46.

be simplistic simply to dismiss the element of sexual coercion or blackmail in this scene.

Judith Haber observes that Beatrice Joanna's 'fears of sexuality (both real and pretended) [are] necessary to the construction of her as a perfect virgin, the perfectly desirable erotic object [...] that these very fears and faintings are themselves taken as the other side of unbridled desire'.¹⁴¹ Consequently, there is potential to dismiss the seeming rape of Beatrice-Joanna as simply another facet to the sexual coercion that characterised male-female sexual relations in the early modern period, including the socially-sanctioned marriage. The question of whether Beatrice-Joanna is raped in *The Changeling* is further complicated by psychoanalytic analyses of her relationship with De Flores, an interpretation which characterises this play's main plot as 'a dark romance' in which Beatrice-Joanna subconsciously yearns for De Flores and welcomes his sexual aggression.¹⁴² However, this interpretation dismisses the potential brutality of rape by problematically suggesting that Beatrice-Joanna 'wanted it', and I agree with Nicol and Barber that the play does not sufficiently support such a reading. Her continued relationship with De Flores may be read as 'a desperate means to achieve a goal stymied at every turn by the structures of patriarchal Alicante' (para. 37): in other words, a negotiation of her position following her rape.

¹⁴¹ Judith Haber, ' "[t] could not choose but follow": Erotic Logic in *The Changeling*', *Representations*, 81 (2003), 79-98 (p. 82).

¹⁴² Roberta Barker and David Nicol, 'Does Beatrice Joanna Have a Subtext?: *The Changeling* on the London Stage', *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 10 (2004), 1-43.

Frances E. Dolan manages to unite elements from Stachniewski, Haber and Nicol and Barber's readings of the play, noting that 'what De Flores is trying to do here is transact a marriage between himself and his mistress, a marriage that he insists is grounded in a kind of equality' – the kind of equality established as Beatrice-Joanna becomes the 'deed's creature' (*The Changeling*, III.4.140) rather than De Flores's social superior.¹⁴³ Dolan's thesis is that Beatrice-Joanna, '[i]n her negotiations with De Flores [...] resembles the women historians find not in rape trials but in the investigations of sexual misconduct that falls outside of the statute definition of rape' (Dolan, p. 12). She thus identifies the ambiguity in this scene that defies easy categorisation as a rape scene, yet I contend that there are sufficient markers to declare it a scene of sexual coercion. Dolan suggests that Beatrice-Joanna 'decides to pay De Flores the price he asks because doing so will enable her to preserve her life, her reputation, and her ability to marry Alsemero' (Dolan, p. 19), a sexual submission that initially appears voluntary until Dolan compares this encounter with that experienced by Lucrece in the many narratives of her rape. A consistent feature of the latter is the threat Sextus makes to place a dead servant in Lucrece's bed once he has dispatched her, thus destroying her posthumous reputation, and it is this threat that prompts Lucrece to acquiesce to her rape.¹⁴⁴ While Lucrece and Beatrice-Joanna may not experience forced penetration, they certainly do experience forced consent: with no other option afforded them, they submit.

¹⁴³Frances E. Dolan, 'Re-reading Rape in *The Changeling*', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 11 (2011), pp. 4-29 (p. 18).

¹⁴⁴ Thomas Heywood, *The Rape of Lucrece* (London: 1608), G2^r - G3^v.

The ambiguity of the sexual coercion scene is exacerbated by Beatrice-Joanna's behaviour prior to this encounter, and her compromising conduct is far more overt than that of Jane and Bianca. In Act One scene one, Beatrice-Joanna's father dismisses her objections to a swift marriage by enumerating Piracquo's virtues, declaring 'I would not change him for a son-in-law / For any in Spain' (*The Changeling*, I.1.219-220). As he prioritises his homosocial union with a terrific son-in-law over his daughter's wishes, the woman in question thinks otherwise and determines to achieve her desires:

VERMANDERO: He shall be bound to me,

As fast as this tie can hold him; I'll want

My will else.

BEATRICE: [*aside.*] I shall want mine if you do it (I.1.222-4).

Deborah Burks has illuminated the significance of the word ‘will’ in this exchange, noting how ‘[t]his daughter asserts herself as having a will separate from her father’s’, with the secondary meaning of ‘will’ as sexual desire further demonstrating Beatrice-Joanna’s desire for sexual independence and her capacity for sexual agency. She opposes her father, and thus society, in choosing for herself an alternative union with Alsemero, one which she proceeds to effect through the use of De Flores. Burks observes that by securing her marriage to Alsemero, ‘Beatrice-Joanna may be attempting to find a culturally acceptable resolution to the problem she faces’.¹⁴⁵ However, the only choice she is allowed is acquiescence to an unwelcome marriage in deference to homosocial concerns, or

¹⁴⁵ Deborah G. Burks, “‘I’ll Want My Will Else’: “The Changeling” and Women’s Complicity with Their Rapists’, *ELH*, 62 (1995), pp. 759-90 (pp. 771-2).

resistance in favour of her own desires. Beatrice-Joanna of course chooses the latter option, ergo her dependence on De Flores and the decision to commit murder.

It is this pattern of behaviour exhibited by Beatrice-Joanna prior to the scene of sexual coercion that disproves Dawson's suggestion that 'despite initially finding De Flores repulsive, Beatrice Joanna seemingly undergoes a psychological transformation as a result of her sexual indiscretion and comes to love him' (Dawson, p .168). I argue that the apparent change in Beatrice-Joanna after sex with De Flores is a fallacy. In her expression of sexual agency, rejection of passivity, and embrace of criminality, Beatrice-Joanna irrevocably compromises herself in a manner that renders her apparent resistance to De Flores immediately suspect to the early modern imagination – an imagination which requires its performing rape victims to combine resistance with virtue and passivity, neither of which are characteristics of Beatrice-Joanna.

The women of these plays were all once 'courtly mistresses' who have been sexualised by their 'lovers', thus beginning the transformation into the modern 'mistress'; however, they need to evince sexual agency as demonstrated through their decision to engage in a mutual sexual relationship with the 'lover'. I have illustrated how Heywood, Middleton and Rowley exploit the interpretive possibilities of rape, depicting ambiguous scenes of sexual coercion which are complicated by the prior behaviour of the female victim; they thus hint at the woman's capacity for sexual agency by potentially choosing to submit to her pursuer. Nevertheless, it is in their behaviour following their 'rape' that this agency is fully realised. I will illustrate this by demonstrating how the dramatists' portrayal of each woman's behaviour 'post-rape' differ from traditional responses

to rape on the early modern stage, all of which carefully excise the survivor from society or safely incorporate her within traditional patriarchal structures; the survivor who comes to occupy the social and cultural space of a ‘mistress’, on the other hand, rejects these conventions in favour of sexual agency.

4. Theatrical Depictions of Rape

There are thirteen plays between 1595 and 1642 which portray rape – or, rather, which depict scenes that follow rape and focus on the woman’s response to her violation. My principal interest is in the ways in which plays during this period depicted the *response* to rape and, more specifically, the raped woman’s response. These responses can be categorized as ‘Death’, ‘Suicide’, ‘Vengeance’, ‘Marriage’, and ‘Becoming a Mistress’. The category of ‘Death’ will not be explored further in this chapter: my argument centres around the woman’s exercise of agency following her rape and the victims of a ‘Death’ are afforded little opportunity to assert agency. Two such victims are Theocrina in *The Unnatural Combat*, and Lucina in *Valentinian*: their deaths are variously ascribed to ‘Greife, and disgrace’ (*Valentinian*, IV.1.1)¹⁴⁶ and the trauma of the rape itself. Neither evince agency and therefore neither choose a particular role to perform following their rapes. Consequently, these women and this category are not relevant to my analysis. The tradition of raped women committing suicide, however, is not new to literature and it is an archetype embodied in the classical literary and historical character of Lucrece or Lucretia. She is a figure who

¹⁴⁶ Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *The Tragedy of Valentinian*, ed. by Robert K. Turner, Jnr., in *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, gen. eds. Fredson Bowers, 10 vols (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1979), IV, pp. 261-414.

appears in many rape narratives as a legendary touchstone for comprehending the violence that has occurred offstage and, more importantly, for how the raped woman may now be expected to respond to her condition. I will analyse Thomas Heywood's play *The Rape of Lucrece* in order to illustrate my analysis of the suicidal response to violation.

a) Suicide

Lucrece is traditionally remembered as the quintessentially chaste and virtuous wife who refused to live with the shame of her rape, as evidenced in *Titus Andronicus* when Marcus refers to Lucrece as 'that chaste dishonoured dame' (*Titus Andronicus*, IV.1.89). Her story hence has tremendous ideological weight in rape narratives, and Heywood's play successfully articulates the primary concern of the violated woman, that she will be forever tainted by Sextus's violation of her: 'I loose my honour of my name and blood, / Lost, Romes imperiall Crowne cannot make good'.¹⁴⁷ When her kinsmen arrive she reveals that has been 'strumpited, / Rauisht, inforc'd' by a stranger, and Brutus is quick to reassure her that they believe her account and do not blame her for what occurred: 'If you were forc'd, the sinne concernes not you, / A woman's born but with a womans strength'. Such reassurance indicates that her audience, in the play and in the playhouse, believe her to be the victim of Sextus's tyrannical lust and she maintains her reputation as a virtuous, chaste woman. There is, therefore, seemingly no reason for her to kill herself, yet she does just this; moreover, her story of rape and suicide became an archetype for exemplary female behaviour

¹⁴⁷ Thomas Heywood, *The Rape of Lucrece* (London: 1608), G3v.

post-rape. The value of this story as an example for raped women is complicated further by the fact that in a Christian context, suicide is a mortal sin that should never be countenanced. Despite all these inconsistencies, the Lucrece narrative remained a primary literary example of positive female behaviour post-rape; as I will show, this is because it suited the purposes of early modern society.

I alluded to the significance of homosocial exchange in earlier understandings of rape, and Heywood accentuates the importance of such homosocial relationships in his play through his representation of both Lucrece's husband and father; their presence highlights her status as an object exchanged between the two in order to cement an alliance. Once Lucrece has been raped, she no longer possesses any value in the system of exchange which underwrites the patriarchy because she is no longer the chaste guarantor of her husband's honour and the integrity of his bloodline. Furthermore, her very being is now pernicious because her continued existence is a constant reminder of the dishonour conferred on Collatine by Sextus: the rape has transformed her into 'a staine to women, [nature's] scorne'. Lucrece has become an anomalous figure,

a raped woman [who] no longer holds a fixed position in society. Because her unstable position has the potential to unsettle her very definition as an object, society often seeks to restabilize and rigidify the meaning of a woman who has been raped either by having her killed or by isolating her from the community through shame (Robertson, 'Public Bodies', p. 284).

Consequently, the best service she may perform for her community would be if she 'internalizes views of herself as damaged goods and, thus, being overcome with shame, isolates herself from the community, most effectively by suicide' ('Public Bodies', p. 285). The prevailing impression created by the Lucrece

narrative is that the best service a raped woman may do her community is to remove herself from it. Heywood indicates as much in his play through Brutus's comments following Lucrece's suicide: she is referred to not as a wronged woman, victim, or even wife or daughter; rather, she has been reduced to a 'chaste body', a 'hoorid object' and 'reuerend loade' whose only use would be as a catalyst to inspire revenge, and not revenge for her suffering, but revenge for the insult done to her male kin.

The raped woman who kills herself receives the most praise in the theatrical canon, further indicating that suicide is the preferred response to violation in literature of the period. Indeed, as Barbara J. Baines says, the mere mention of suicide (or the intent to do so) after rape is a convenient 'short-hand' for denoting the woman's lack of complicity in the act itself – a short-hand for virtue (Baines, p. 158). However, several plays of the period achieve the same erasure of the tainted female without having her take her own life. Like Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*, she may be dispatched by a male relative when she is apparently unable to do the act herself. Another method of dispatch employed by dramatists is the convenient death of the woman in question – as mentioned above. This ending avoids any potential awkwardness that may arise from a positive portrayal of suicide in a Christian community, while also pointing towards divine intervention on the behalf of the patriarchal body. There is, however, another response to rape which requires the excision of the survivor. That is the woman who responds with anger, desiring vengeance in a distinctly unfeminine manner.

b) Vengeance

The raped woman who reacts angrily to her assault and seeks vengeance is following the path of a different classical archetype from Lucrece. She is choosing to conflate the characters of Philomela and her sister Procne, two sisters immortalized by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*. These sisters unite in their revenge against Philomela's rapist and Procne's husband, with Philomela's vengeful intent articulated clearly: 'Yea, I myself, rejecting shame, thy doings will bewray. / And if I may have power to come abroad, them blaze I will (*Metamorphoses*, The Sixth Book, ll. 694-5).¹⁴⁸ The anger that both sisters convey would be problematic for an early modern audience as revenge and anger were perceived as masculine drives and masculine prerogatives. Karen Robertson's work illuminates the fact that only one form of violence was considered permissible for women on stage, and that was 'self-cancellation – of agency expressed through death'.¹⁴⁹ Similarly, Melissa Sanchez proposes that 'Lucrece's suicide – violence directed against herself - is the only legitimate expression of female agency' (Sanchez, p. 95). A woman who desires or performs violent actions, even in response to rape, is refusing to conform to the traditional tenets of femininity. Dawson observes that the early modern woman's 'ability to articulate anger and opposition was restricted by a whole host of cultural expectations', and '[t]his is reflected in the literature, where ignoble women [...] generally strike out at others, whereas virtuous female characters hurt themselves instead' (Dawson, p. 9). This may also

¹⁴⁸ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ed. by Madeleine Forey, trans. by Arthur Golding (London: Penguin, 2002).

¹⁴⁹ Karen Robertson, 'Rape and the Appropriation of Progne's Revenge in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*', in *Representing Rape*, ed. by Karen Robertson and Christine M. Rose, pp. 213-240 (p. 221).

be seen in what Garthine Walker identifies as the ‘rape narratives produced in [early modern law] courts’: ‘men frequently portrayed the women who accused them as malicious, revenge-seeking harpies who “plotted, practiced and conspired” with like-minded confederates to bring about the “utter overthrow and destruction” of hapless male victims’ (Walker, p. 4). Raped women who respond angrily to their assault are unfeminine viragos, obviously prioritising their illegitimate emotional needs before the well-being of society, and consequently differentiating themselves from those who follow the approved route of Lucrece.

Lucrece is easily categorised as an abused innocent whose behaviour following her rape is exemplary - not only does she remove herself from society, but in her manner of doing so, she appropriately places the onus of revenge in the hands of her male relations, where it belongs.¹⁵⁰ The Philomelas and Procnes, on the other hand, damage the community by usurping male prerogatives (of anger and revenge) and thus must be destroyed. I will expand upon the danger posed by women who usurp male prerogatives in the next chapter. Suffice it to say that such women may be powerful presences onstage and proactive agents but, by becoming society’s nightmare, they are easily categorized with other disorderly women. This may be seen in the character of Jacinta in *All’s Lost By Lust* as she demands retribution for her wrong:

O that I could spit out the spiders bladder,

[...]

¹⁵⁰ I am indebted to Bamford’s analysis for this observation.

And altogether choke thee! (III).¹⁵¹

Jacinta's behaviour, as noted by Bamford, is strikingly reminiscent of witchcraft: 'By calling down divine vengeance on Rodericke, Jacinta places herself in the company of witches, beyond the pale of the early modern community' (Bamford, p. 108). Similarly, the raped daughters of Fletcher's *Bonduca* are rejected by their honourable cousin Caratach, who disapproves of their blood-lust and general interference in the male exercise of war:

CARATACH: A womans wisdom in our triumphs? Out,

Out ye sluts, ye follies;

[...]

2. DAUGHTER: By — Uncle,

We will have vengeance for our rapes (III.5.66-9).¹⁵²

Tellingly, Caratach is unsympathetic to his relatives' ordeal now that they have engaged in unfeminine behaviour. As Karen Bamford observes,

Bonduca suggests that the victim of sexual assault is sympathetic only to the extent that – like Lucrece, Virginia and Lucina – she is self-destructive; and that the woman who pursues revenge for a rape – like Philomel, Jacinta and the daughters of *Bonduca* – is demonic, not heroic (Bamford, pp.121-2).

Once a woman evinces vengeful intent, she becomes a villain, and she does not even avoid the fate of Lucrece despite their different responses. *All's Lost By*

¹⁵¹ William Rowley, *All's Lost By Lust* (London: 1633), E2^r.

¹⁵² Beaumont and Fletcher, *Bonduca*, ed. by Cyrus Hoy, in *Dramatic Works*, gen. ed. Fredson Bowers, IV, pp. 149-259.

Lust's Jacinta and the raped daughters in *Bonduca* do not succeed in punishing their royal and imperial violators respectively, rendering their rebellion useless and deaths pitiable.

There is one slight deviation from the 'Angry Vengeance' paradigm, and that can be found in James Shirley's *St Patrick for Ireland* (1640). In this play the raped Emeria initially determines to die: 'Come, cure of my dishonour, and with bloud / Wash off my staine. (*St Patrick for Ireland*, IV.1.170-3).¹⁵³ However, upon understanding how she has been deceived by '[m]agicall imposture' (179), Emeria determines to 'live a little longer' (183) and subsequently stabs her rapist while declaring 'I am proude / To be the gods' revenger' (221-2). At this point in the play, the rape victim simultaneously rejects participating in a traditional rape narrative that demands her death, yet recognises that she has no further utility in the homosocial community as a former virgin. However, St Patrick provides the perfect solution for this anomalous rape victim: becoming a nun. Determining that Emeria 'will be Spouse to an eternall Bridegroome', St Patrick efficiently removes Emeria from society and thus negates the threat she poses as a vengeful rape victim; she may not be dead, but she might as well be to the men who comprise the early modern patriarchal community. The slight deviation from already established patterns of representing rape victims is probably due to the allegorical function of the *St Patrick for Ireland*, with John P. Turner describing the play as an adaptation of 'the medieval saint's life [...] to the purposes of the

¹⁵³ James Shirley, *A Critical Edition of James Shirley's St. Patrick for Ireland*, ed. by John Porter Turner, Jr. (London: Garland Publishing, 1979).

chronicle play'.¹⁵⁴ Ultimately, however, the disorderly woman in this play is shown to have internalised the patriarchal values that identify her as fundamentally sullied by her rape, and eventually she is safely removed from society. The deviation is thus minor and does not alter the larger understanding of a woman's place in the rape narrative.

The woman who responds vengefully to her rape embodies a disruptive force that is anathema to social equilibrium but nevertheless comfortably belongs in the category of villainous or evil women who will be summarily eradicated from society at the first opportunity. There was, however, a type of rape victim whose behaviour toward their rapist differs drastically from the vengeful victim, and that was the victim who marries her attacker.

c) Marriage

Suzanne Gossett explores what she identifies as a seventeenth-century experiment in rape narratives: that of the violated woman marrying her rapist. The result of this marriage between a rape victim and her rapist is that the former is allowed to survive her violation and retain (to a certain extent) her reputation. Legally the question of marriage post-rape was a contentious one, as shown above, specifically because of the tension between the property rights of the patriarch in charge of the victim and her decision to efface her attack by wedding her rapist. However, legal complexities are not in evidence in the two early

¹⁵⁴ John P. Turner, 'Introduction', in *A Critical Edition of James Shirley's St. Patrick for Ireland*, pp. 6-78 (p. 63).

modern plays between 1595 and 1642 that address the question of marrying the rapist, Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Queen of Corinth* and Middleton's *The Spanish Gypsy*.¹⁵⁵ Instead, the respective dramatists concern themselves with the moral implications of such matrimonial unions, with qualified success.

The Queen of Corinth mitigates the callous rape of Merione by Theanor by having the former declare that his 'forc'd embraces' (*The Queen of Corinth*, V.4.97) were unacceptable only 'in respect, that then they were unlawfull / Unbless'd by *Hymen*, and left stings behind them' (99-100).¹⁵⁶ If this still proves distasteful to an audience, especially considering Theanor's questionable character, the dramatists endeavour to assuage such feelings by establishing a former pre-contract between the participants: 'She was his Wife before the face of Heaven, / Although some Ceremonious formes were wanting' (V.4.196-7). By mentioning the pre-contract, the playwright suggests that this 'rape' could be subsequently characterised as an assertion of conjugal rights, the concluding act of a marital contract that only needs to be recognised. The dramatists responsible for *The Spanish Gypsy* are more effective than Beaumont and Fletcher in

¹⁵⁵ Bianca in *Women Beware Women* also marries her rapist, but this matrimonial union is only performed after the participants have already engaged in a sexual affair of some duration. It is achieved only through the murder of Bianca's husband and is condemned by the Cardinal, and it certainly does not form part of the 'happy' ending that concludes the aforementioned tragicomedies. Consequently, I will treat Bianca separately from the characters of Merione and Clara as primarily a 'mistress' rather than a 'wife'.

¹⁵⁶ Beaumont and Fletcher, *The Queen of Corinth*, ed. by Turner, in *The Dramatic Works of the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, gen. eds. Bowers, 10 vols (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), VIII, pp. 1-112.

depicting marriage following a rape.¹⁵⁷ The rapist may be tricked into wedding his victim but their eventual marriage is rendered more palatable than that between Merione and Theanor by the playwrights' portrayal of Roderigo's character. This rapist evinces discomfort and remorse for his actions throughout the play: 'My shame may live without me, / But in my soul I bear my guilt about me' (I.3.103-4).¹⁵⁸ After his marriage to a supposed stranger, Roderigo laments the fact that he did not wed his erstwhile victim. Upon discovering Clara's identity, he is overjoyed that he may 'redeem [his] fault' (V.1.57) by marrying his 'victim', thus eradicating his rape and her 'dishonour' through marriage.

Although I am greatly indebted to Gossett's work, I do not agree with her conclusion that the 'classic' ending – in which the raped woman kills herself – implies a greater respect for the female characters: 'The heroines who survive are much more individuated, and interesting, but the authors never quite convince us that they are not also compromised'.¹⁵⁹ The characters who commit suicide may possess 'a personal integrity which cannot survive violation' (Gossett, p. 324); however, their suicide is also an implicit acknowledgement that they have been tainted, thus reflecting the homosocial perspective in which women are little more than objects of exchange and guarantors of pure bloodlines. In this respect,

¹⁵⁷ *The Spanish Gypsy* is the work of Thomas Middleton, Samuel Rowley, John Ford and Thomas Dekker. See Suzanne Gossett's introduction to the play in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, gen. eds. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino. pp. 1723-7.

¹⁵⁸ Thomas Middleton, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, ed. by Gary Taylor, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, gen. eds. Taylor and Lavagnino, pp. 1727-65.

¹⁵⁹ Suzanne Gossett, ' "Best Men are Molded out of Faults": Marrying the Rapist in Jacobean Drama', *English Literary Renaissance* 14 (1984), pp. 305-327 (p. 324).

Gossett ignores the role of the theatre as an ideological state apparatus and the potential ‘propaganda value of these plays’ (Baines, p. 197). I agree with Bamford’s interpretation of these narratives, that by marrying her rapist the victim is not only allowing for her own re-integration into (chaste) society, but also redeeming the man who has failed to uphold the principles of said society through his lack of restraint: ‘the heroines of the marriage plays give up the right to revenge and instead accept their penitent assailants as husbands – a resolution that signifies the salvation of errant youths’ (Bamford, p. 124). She becomes chaste again, he is redeemed from his arrant and unmanly lust, and the community is no longer troubled by the spectre of illicit sexual activity. Most importantly, this woman may be comfortably categorised as a chaste wife. Nevertheless, it is worth remembering that such a neat solution is predicated on the marital availability or social suitability of rapist and victim. This is one of the reasons why marriage is not an option for Jane Shore, Bianca, and Beatrice-Joanna following their rape.

I have established above that the literary responses to rape tend to conform to three specific paths, that of suicide, vengeance, or marriage. Despite the potential for ambiguity and disquiet in each response, they all conform to misogynist expectations and/or archetypes: the suicidal victim is no longer valuable to society, so she eliminates herself from it; the vengeful victim becomes a villain, one to be ostracized and eliminated; and the marrying victim incorporates herself and her attacker back into the acceptable parameters of the community. The neglected response has been that of the woman who engages in a sexual relationship with her attacker, becoming a ‘mistress’ in its modern sense. The rejection of traditional and safe responses to rape by Heywood, Middleton and Rowley indicates their engagement in creating a new breed of woman, or

rather transforming an old one; they expand on their earlier sexualisation of the ‘courtly mistress’ to depict one whose ambiguous demonstration of sexual agency during earlier scenes is rendered unambiguous by her decision to engage in a sexual relationship with her assailant. In so doing, this ‘courtly mistress’ occupies the cultural space of the modern ‘mistress’, and to demonstrate this I will now examine how the playwrights portray the erstwhile victim’s willing acceptance of or engagement in a sexual relationship with her erstwhile attacker. As depicted by their respective dramatists, Jane Shore, Bianca, and Beatrice-Joanna choose to remain in this sexual relationship because it is advantageous or pleasing to her.

5. Post-Rape Behaviour

a) Jane Shore

Thomas Heywood does not depict Jane Shore’s immediate response to her coerced sexual encounter; instead, the audience next views Jane through the eyes of her unhappy husband as the ‘lady-like attired’ royal companion of some renown. Deprived of Jane’s own words, the audience is obliged, much like Matthew, to observe her conduct: ‘Once Shore’s true wife, now Edward’s concubine. / Amongst the rest, I’ll note her new behaviour’ (*1 Edward IV*, 22.26-7). Initially, the audience is obliged to accept a male interpretation of Jane’s conduct and her new position in the social hierarchy. This was not uncommon practice for early modern playwrights, as I will demonstrate in my final chapter. Jane Shore’s only direct acknowledgement of what transpired between her and Edward after the event occurs when she endeavours to defend herself to her husband:

I did endure the long'st and greatest siege
That ever battered on poor chastity;
And but to him that did assault the same,
For ever it had been invincible.
But I will yield it back again to thee.
(*1 Edward IV*, 22.89-93).

This speech seemingly clarifies her resistance to the King's attentions, but as illustrated above her conduct in these interactions was not entirely innocent. The veracity of her words is also compromised somewhat by the fact that this is not an aside or soliloquy but rather an effort to persuade her husband that she deserves his forgiveness. Even so she manages to undercut her argument when she claims that her 'chastity' would have remained 'invincible' had it been someone else who had pursued her; the implication may be that she was literally powerless to resist the King of England, but the interpretive ambiguity could lead an audience to surmise that she may have been powerless to resist her attraction to the man besieging her - or to resist the advantages that becoming his sexual partner would entail. This latter possibility is supported by her subsequent comment that '[she] will refuse the pleasures of the court' (*1 Edward IV*, 22.102). Such remarks indicate that Jane is not unsatisfied with her new life.

Aside from this apparent appreciation for the luxuries that life at court affords her, there is another notable benefit of being the King's sexual partner: power. As Jane is approached by various suitors beseeching her aid, it becomes evident that her choice to become the 'beloved' of the King has allowed her access to a considerable amount of influence: 'What is't with Edward that I cannot do? / I'll make thee wealthier than e'er Richard was' (22.115-16).

Heywood's portrayal of Jane as a powerful figure within Edward's court echoes the various depictions of Shore's wife within the genre of royal mistress complaints. For example, in Thomas Churchyard's poem 'Shore's Wife', the eponymous heroine declares

I governed him that ruled all this land:
I bare the sword though he did weare the crowne,
I strake the stroke that threwe the mightye downe (ll. 173-5).¹⁶⁰

Indeed, her influence is so strong that at one point the Queen herself begs Jane to entreat the king for a favour. Notably, this is the only scene in which Jane and Edward interact following his sexual coercion of her, and it reveals the mutuality of the relationship when Jane actively engages Edward's emotions to achieve her wishes: firstly, by pleading 'Great king, let me but beg one boon of thee' (2 *Edward IV*, 10.142), and later by coyly demanding a favour: 'Come, Edward, I must not take this answer. / Needs must I have some grace for Stranguidge' (2 *Edward IV*, 10.165-6). Jane is obviously confident in her influence over her lover.

Jane Shore is a woman who willingly engages the affections of her lover in order to achieve specific ends, be they emotional or practical. This is therefore a relationship of mutuality, not one in which Jane remains a powerless vessel for another's desire. Although an audience sees no further interaction between Edward and Jane, the deference with which the majority of other characters regard her indicates the authority she now wields as royal paramour. It is evident that she has seized the opportunities with which Edward's assault has provided

¹⁶⁰ Thomas Churchyard, 'Shore's Wife', in *The Mirror for Magistrates*, ed. by Lily B. Campbell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), pp. 373-387.

her rather than acting the role of reluctant sexual slave. Such behaviour is further evidence of her agency, and although she may decry the position in which she finds herself to her husband, she certainly utilizes her power to full effect throughout her tenure as Edward's beloved – a power that as a bourgeois housewife she would never otherwise possess.

b) Bianca

Women Beware Women differs from the other two plays under discussion in this chapter in that it depicts the survivor's immediate reaction to her violation. Bianca returns on stage alone following her sexual encounter with the Duke, angry and vengeful. Much like Lucrece, Bianca acknowledges that her 'honour's leprous' (*Women Beware Women*, II.2.423) and asks Providence to 'poison all at once' (425) the beauty 'that caused the leprosy' (424). However, she swiftly redirects her fury away from herself toward the man who delivered her to the Duke:

I'm like that great one

Who, making politic use of a base villain,

"He likes the treason well, but hates the traitor."

So I hate thee, slave (II.2.440-3).

Revealingly, she does not blame or denigrate the man who lately assaulted her. Already Middleton has indicated that this relationship may blossom into something greater, an impression that develops in the subsequent scene where Bianca expresses dissatisfaction with her current partner and the life he provides for her to her mother-in-law:

I ask less now

Than what I had at home when I was a maid,

And at my father's house (III.1.52-4).

Middleton suggests that a union with the Duke is more appealing for Bianca in regard to her social position, which is clearly superior to Leantio's and one that inspires dissatisfaction with their living arrangements. Tensions erupt further when the Duke's messenger arrives requesting Bianca's presence and Leantio's response is to 'lock [his] life's best treasure up' (*Women Beware Women*, III.1.247). Rejecting Leantio's efforts at concealment and discovering the Duke's invitation, Bianca makes a choice. Her departure indicates that this woman, the sexualised 'courtly mistress', has decided to engage in a relationship with her erstwhile attacker.

Bianca acquires a comparable position to Jane in respect of her relationship with the ruler, yet that is where the similarity ends. Heywood is not concerned with Jane's relationship with the King after she has become his 'mistress' and prefers to delineate her actions as enabled by this relationship; Middleton's focus appears to be the relationship that has grown between the Duke and the Venetian gentlewoman. As I discussed earlier, the relationship between Bianca and the Duke includes hyperbolic compliments from the latter and intimate conversations between the two. Bianca actually initiates the asides mocking Fabritio, demonstrating a degree of equality – or at least reciprocity – in their relationship. The Duke's mention of his 'special care' for Bianca in securing her 'lodging near [him] now' does not discomfort his initially reluctant paramour; instead, she praises his 'great' love (III.2.239-240). Middleton thus prioritizes the

E'en vexed to stay one minute after thee (V.1.236-8).

Bianca's principal achievement by becoming the sexual partner of her pursuer is in her acquisition of a lover and husband that she loves and respects.

c) **Beatrice-Joanna**

Unlike the two mistresses already discussed, the female protagonist of *The Changeling* benefits least from becoming a mistress, principally because her partner is her social inferior and not capable of bestowing the prestige and power that a ruler may on his beloved. However, Beatrice-Joanna does ultimately achieve her marriage to Alsemero by acquiescing to De Flores and thus purchasing his silence. The sexual blackmail scene is followed by a dumbshow depicting Beatrice-Joanna's apparent abandonment by Piracquo and her subsequent marriage to Alsemero. This dramatic choice signifies a passage of time that, like *Edward IV*, omits the woman's immediate reaction to the sexual encounter that occurred offstage. It is unclear whether she has continued to engage in a sexual relationship with De Flores during this time, but Beatrice-Joanna is given an opportunity to reflect upon what transpired in this opening speech of Act Four: 'This fellow has undone me endlessly; / Never was bride so fearfully distressed' (*The Changeling*, IV.1.1-2). However, this is not a sentiment relating to the trauma of sexual coercion; rather, it is concern for her husband's imminent discovery that she is not a virgin. Middleton hints at the ambiguous nature of her relationship with De Flores by having her refer to her sexual fall as her 'shame' (IV.1.13) and her 'fault': 'Before whose [Alsemero] judgement will my fault appear / Like malefactors' crimes before tribunals' (IV.1.7-8). The

majority of the speech is devoted to her fears of discovery, again focusing on culpability rather than victimisation.

Beatrice-Joanna's next conversation with her blackmailer occurs as Diaphanta is consummating Beatrice-Joanna's marriage with Alsemero, during which time she laments her waiting-woman's betrayal and the lack of loyalty amongst her adherents. Her piteous 'I must trust somebody' (V.1.15) illuminates her loneliness, a condition caused by her deceit and immorality that has necessarily alienated her from the patriarchal community in general, and her male relations in particular. Middleton and Rowley accentuate this point in their depiction of Isabella in the subplot, with her isolation amongst madmen, self-serving servants, and a distrustful husband reflecting Beatrice-Joanna's own segregation from a society which denies her the opportunity to exercise her will. She was alone from the moment she chose to resist her father's plans for marriage, so the principal advantage she gains from her sexual congress with De Flores is a devoted confidant and co-conspirator:

BEATRICE: I'm forced to love thee now,

'Cause thou provid'st so carefully for my honour.

DE FLORES: 'Slid, it concerns the safety of us both,
Our pleasure and continuance (V.1.47-50).

Beatrice-Joanna is no victim of continued sexual assault, as evidenced by her willing engagement with De Flores as an ally. She asks him to ‘[a]vise [her] now to fall upon some ruin, / There is no counsel safe else’ (V.1.26-7) and subsequently gives permission for his plan: ‘DE FLORES: You talk of danger when your fame’s on fire? / BEATRICE: That’s true; do what thou wilt now’

(V.1.34-5). This allusion to ‘fame’ indicates another possible reason for Beatrice-Joanna’s continued association with De Flores: fear of him possibly revealing their encounter and sexually shaming her. However, the play only addresses her fear of Alsemero doing so with his science, identifying him as the source of anxiety rather than De Flores and solidifying her connection with her servant as they conspire to maintain Beatrice-Joanna’s reputation. As another scheme of De Flores succeeds in eliminating a potential obstacle, Beatrice-Joanna extols her lover’s virtues: ‘But look upon his care, who would not love him? / The east is not more beauteous than his service’ (V.1.70-1). This evident ‘love’ for his ‘service’ demonstrates a perverted mutuality emerging from sexualised courtly language. This is a woman with agency, actively engaging in a mutual – if dysfunctional – relationship with a man who devotes himself to her service in exchange for a continued sexual relationship. She may desire Alsemero as a husband, but she is forced to love her sexual partner and fellow-conspirator as they unite against anyone who threatens their happiness.

The play concludes with their simultaneous death from wounds acquired as they are locked together in Alsemero’s closet, and although their demise does not suggest a similar depth of feeling as that of Bianca and the Duke, their mutual death following the discovery of their villainy is nevertheless a fitting conclusion to their affair. This bloody demise has attracted considerable attention from scholars such as Dawson and Kern Paster, with both noting how this death seemingly conforms to patriarchal conventions. Kern Paster notes that ‘bleeding is construed as an issue of bodily voluntariness [...] and self-control’ (Kern Paster, p.78), and thus women’s ‘[m]enstruation comes to resemble the other varieties of female incontinence – sexual, urinary, linguistic – that serves as powerful signs of

woman's inability to control the workings of her own body' (Kern Paster, p. 83). Beatrice-Joanna's death is therefore in keeping with patriarchal ideology in that she

has indulged a tendency to rebellion and disobedience which the imagery of plethoric blood connects with female bodiliness [sic]. In her recourse to the language of disease in the blood, Beatrice-Joanna justifies a patriarchal narrative naturalizing restrictiveness and endorsing principles of expulsion "for your better health" (Kern Paster, pp. 89-90).

Dawson continues this argument, clarifying that the death of a raped or promiscuous woman re-enacts the medical procedure of 'bloodletting [as] a means of cleansing the family bloodline and of re-establishing ownership of the violated female body', and thus Beatrice-Joanna's fate reflects the medical perception that bloodletting 'purge[s] the female body of the stain of illicit sex' (Dawson, p. 172). With De Flores committing the stabbing, the play depicts one poison (De Flores) purging another (Beatrice-Joanna) from the body politic. These arguments certainly have some validity, as evidenced by Beatrice-Joanna's own dying words to her father: 'I am that of your blood was taken from you / For your better health (*The Changeling*, V.3.150-1). However, I argue that this analysis is limited and that there are other elements of this blood imagery worth consideration.

At the conclusion of the play, Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores bleed together, mingling blood in a way that collapses the 'hierarchical structures of social difference' (Kern Paster, p. 68) that blood signifies – namely that Beatrice-Joanna's familial blood renders her socially superior to the debased parentage or bloodline of De Flores. In death, however, their blood mixes in a suggestive

image of unity and equality. De Flores may have already noted their moral parity when declaring her 'the deed's creature' but this mingling of blood undercuts any social distinction while metaphorically re-enacting their first sexual encounter. This collapse of social boundaries, specifically with the fallen Beatrice-Joanna, recalls the social boundaries so often alluded to in Petrarchan poetry where the unattainable, noble lady is out of the lover's reach. Also, the ideological connotations of Beatrice-Joanna's spilt blood - symbolising her lack of self-control and chastity - prolong the question concerning her acquiescence to her sexual assault as well as raising the issue of her chastity; although engaged in an illicit sexual relationship with De Flores, it is ultimately a chaste one as she does not engage in sexual relations with Alsemero before being murdered. The audience is thus left with a woman who seemingly submits to patriarchal conventions which require her polluted blood be purged from her family and the body politic, but also a woman whose blood is mixed with her sole sexual partner who accompanies her in death.

Modern performances tend to accentuate the similarities between Beatrice-Joanna's death and her 'rape' with the murder in the cupboard presented as another consummation or rape in which the woman is irrevocably penetrated. In this way, directors can emphasize the collaboration of the two characters, a couple who become united in life and death once they have engaged in a sexual relationship. In this respect the scene resembles a bloodier version of Bianca and the Duke's demise, although this time it is the man who murders the woman before following suit. Mutuality and sexuality are thus emphasised in this death scene, both characteristics of the 'sexual mistress'.

In the three plays discussed above an apparently violated woman make a choice that gives her access to certain opportunities or powers that she would not otherwise have. In *Edward IV* there is no evidence that Jane immediately returned to her husband after the King's sexual coercion (unlike Bianca in *Women Beware Women*), and she is certainly no prisoner as evidenced by her belated offer to return to Shore should he forgive her. Instead she engages with various suitors requesting her help as the King's 'beloved', utilising her power over Edward's affections to influence political, legal, and personal matters in a manner that she never could were she not his sexual partner. Despite Jane's often articulated shame over her current social situation, Heywood still managed to hint that she is not entirely opposed to her new life – it is she who alludes to the 'pleasures' of the court that she is willing to relinquish for Shore. On the other hand, Bianca's affection for her husband swiftly dissipates following her assault and she becomes increasingly aware of the chafing restrictions of the bourgeois life he offers her; consequently, she chooses to accept the Duke's invitation to return to court, participating in an affair that is sufficiently intimate and reciprocal that she eventually marries him and chooses suicide rather than live without him. Beatrice-Joanna, meanwhile, finds a collaborator in De Flores as the two engage in a conspiracy to deceive the household; her affection is complicated by her apparent feelings for Alsemero, but she does repeatedly declare her 'love' for her secret lover whose 'service' allows her to maintain this new life she endeavoured to create. Their death symbolically re-enacts their first union in a macabre re-working of Bianca and the Duke's dual demise in *Women Beware Women*. Rather than depicting the conventional fates of the dramatic rape victim, these playwrights portray three women who willingly engage sexually with their

pursuers in order to maintain the power, protection, or personal satisfaction that this mutual relationship provides them.

6. Conclusion

There are two primary differences between the modern definition of ‘mistress’ and the early modern understanding of the ‘courtly mistress’: firstly, the former includes the reality or probability of sex; secondly, the ‘modern mistress’ engages in a mutual relationship with a man. There is evidence that the ‘courtly mistress’ of Petrarchan poetry was being subjected to increasing definitional strain in the late sixteenth century as writers like John Donne subverted or mocked courtly conventions – often by representing the lover as sexually aggressive and suggesting that the supposed ‘Petrarchan mistress’ was willing to submit to these overtures. Similar subversions of the term occur in various casual references in plays of the period when characters assume ‘courtly mistress’ to be a euphemism, but these subversions indicate that the writers were consistently pushing against the prevailing ‘orthodox’ perception of the term ‘mistress’ as a word denoting the unattainable object of a man’s desire. The theatre effected a substantial shift in this perception, one that is demonstrated effectively in *Edward IV Parts 1 and 2*, *Women Beware Women*, and *The Changeling*.

The ‘courtly mistress’ is traditionally divorced from sex, the lover’s desire for her destined to be unrequited and designed to spiritually elevate him through the purity of his love. The playwrights therefore effected a transformation of this ‘courtly mistress’ by evoking her onstage – achieved through the language and initial conduct of the desiring lovers when considering their respective ladies – before irrevocably sexualising her – achieved through the aggressive sexual

overtures of the desiring lovers. Their sexual aggression is amply demonstrated through the playwrights' decision to stage their pursuit as a form of sexual coercion or blackmail. The 'courtly mistress' existed in a literary dialogue controlled by a specific set of conventions: the desiring man loved his 'mistress' purely; he expected her to dismiss him as one unworthy of her affections; and he accepted this dismissal. When the desiring man refuses to accept these parameters, the 'courtly mistress' is subtly transformed from an aloof object of adoration divorced from sexuality to a woman who a man may sexually possess despite her dismissal. The King, the Duke, and the servant all desire their respective women in a carnal fashion and intend to achieve their desires, and therefore their use of courtly phrases or imagery as they sexually pursue or subdue their women subverts the traditional understanding of the 'courtly mistress' and sexualises her. The audience would witness this transformation and recognise the definitional development of 'mistress' from its chaste courtly iteration to a sexual one.

This sexualisation of the 'mistress' is only part of the transformation, for if this was the sole innovation then the dramatic representation would not differ marked from the sardonic tone of Donne and his ilk. However, there is an important difference between the 'mistress' in poetry and the 'mistress' on stage: the latter has a voice and agency – even if they are mediated through male dramatists and players. The primary focus in Petrarchan poetry is the desiring subject, the 'I', not the desired 'object' whose voice and actions are ultimately irrelevant; the conventions of the theatre required the woman to act and react to her 'lover'. These dramatists recognised and capitalised on this need for the pursued woman to evince agency by placing her within a rape narrative. The

developing legal understanding of rape and how it may be punished placed increasing attention on the conduct of the supposed rape victim. A woman's consent was an exercise of sexual agency, and the newfound focus on consent in determining whether rape has occurred in a legal setting meant that a woman was required to demonstrate her non-consent by performing her innocence to witnesses following her attack. These rape narratives were therefore invested in depictions of male sexual pursuit (in its least benign form) and female sexual agency, both of which are pivotal elements to the modern understanding of 'mistress'. These rape scenes consequently became a ripe forum for playwrights engaged in transforming the understanding of this term.

Much as an early modern church court would judge the prior and subsequent behaviour of the survivor to ascertain whether the inevitably unwitnessed rape occurred – thus interpreting her sexual agency or lack thereof - an early modern audience is encouraged to judge the prior and subsequent behaviour of Jane Shore, Bianca and Beatrice-Joanna to ascertain whether the sexual encounter that inevitably occurred off stage is an act of rape. Ultimately the rape scenes in the plays under discussion in this chapter are ambiguous, for while they certainly depict sexual coercion or sexual blackmail, the scenes in performance may be rendered more overtly aggressive or they may suggest a willingness on behalf of the women. They direct the audience's attention to the sexual agency of the pursued women, especially in her behaviour subsequent to the sexual encounter, and in so doing they illustrate how the sexually pursued woman, or the sexualised 'courtly mistress', is evincing sexual agency by choosing to engage in a mutual sexual relationship with a man. Jane, Bianca and Beatrice-Joanna choose to become extra-marital sexual partners rather than follow dramatic conventions that

would require an apparently raped woman to excise herself from society through suicide or death, or safely incorporate herself within it through a socially-sanctioned marriage to her violator. Instead, these women choose to become the sexual partners of their pursuers because doing so would provide them with more personal, social, political or practical satisfaction than submitting to patriarchally-approved alternatives that would ultimately deprive them of these benefits. Not only is the 'courtly mistress' sexualised in these plays, she chooses to engage in a mutual sexual relationship; as such, she is transformed into the 'mistress' in its modern meaning.

In this chapter I have explored three very different characters but Jane Shore and Bianca have something significant in common: they both become the sexual partners of the ruler. This usurpation of a particular role and particular powers in a courtly setting will be the focus of my next chapter. Having explored how the 'courtly mistress' was transformed into the 'sexual mistress' – an extra-marital sexual partner – I will now analyse portrayals of a particular breed of 'mistress', namely the 'ruler's mistress'. The extra-marital sexual partner of a man is frequently an unofficial presence in a community who may wreak havoc on traditional power structures, and dramatists highlight this troubling facet of the 'sexual mistress' by examining her in a courtly setting as the partner of a ruler, thus providing symbolic representation of her potential threat to patriarchal power structures by placing her adjacent to the earthly representative and enforcer of said power structures. I argue that playwrights represent this new breed of mistress by emphasising how her troublingly illegitimate presence allows her to usurp the prerogatives and masculinity of male characters.

CHAPTER TWO

The Ruler's Mistress: Gender and Usurping of Prerogatives

‘For tho he was King, yet Shores wife swayd the sword’ (*The True Tragedie of Richard the Third*, 11.1087-8).¹⁶² This quotation excellently illustrates the power inherent in the position of a ‘ruler’s mistress’, confirming the influence that the sexual partner of a king may wield over her lover while also reminding an audience of the sexual nature of their relationship as signified through the imagery of the ruler’s phallic sword. As the early modern public became gradually attuned to the variation of the ‘courtly mistress’ that I delineated in Chapter One, they were similarly exposed to theatrical depictions of the ‘sexualised mistress’ in her most public incarnation – what can be retroactively identified as the ‘ruler’s mistress’ - whose access to the ruler was unofficial yet potentially the source of significant power. This is a development on the tradition of the ‘Petrarchan mistress’ whose power over her ‘lover’ is principally emotional and expressed through frustrated gestures of literary adoration; the ‘ruler’s mistress’ could parlay her intimacy and access to her lover into political and social influence. Despite having no official or legitimate role in the centre of power (the ruler’s court) the ‘mistress’ may become a locus for influence through the usurpation of specific roles or prerogatives.

In the course of this chapter I will demonstrate that as the courtly environment had no official space or position for a ‘ruler’s mistress’, dramatists negotiated their position within a royal household through having the ‘mistress’ character usurp various social prerogatives and identities. These prerogatives

¹⁶² Anonymous, *The True Tragedie of Richard III* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929).

belong to those in legitimate positions at court, positions that are socially and legally recognised such as councillor or queen consort. There was no official role of ‘royal mistress’ in the English court nor those represented onstage, and therefore a woman who occupies the cultural space of ‘mistress’ is obliged to seize the rights and/or responsibilities of those who do have a legitimate place in the ruler’s inner circle. Throughout this chapter I will refer to the sexualised ‘ruler’s mistress’s’ position as illegitimate because it has no official sanction or protections, rendering her vulnerable to the ruler’s whims or death in a way that those in legitimate positions are not. In her most benign incarnation, the ‘sexual mistress’ could usurp the traditional prerogatives of a queen consort, namely as a kindly intercessor with a monarch, a distributor of patronage whose access to the King is not particularly threatening. This incarnation of benign intercessory ‘mistress’ is exemplified by Shore’s Wife in *The True Tragedy of Richard III*. I will examine the traditional role of the queen consort in early modern thought and practice, focusing particularly on traditions of queenly intercession; in so doing, I will establish that although Shore’s Wife’s usurpation of this role is an affront to social norms, the act itself does not render her as fundamentally threatening as the other ‘sexual mistresses’ discussed in this chapter for one simple reason: the ‘mistress’ is usurping the prerogatives of another woman, a substantially less threatening subversion of traditional courtly roles than that which occurs when the ‘mistress’ usurps male roles.

This earlier breed of the ‘ruler’s mistress’ evidently lost its popularity among theatre audiences and a more threatening version of the ‘ruler’s mistress’ emerged on the Jacobean stage. Such early seventeenth-century dramatizations of the ‘mistress’ in her modern meaning came to life through the various conflicting

discourses of favouritism and tyranny, in which the position of ‘mistress’ is characterised by her usurpation of masculine authority and identity. This leads me to the next section in the chapter where I will analyse early modern writings on the practice of political counsel and its connection to favouritism. I will illustrate how the ‘mistress’ characters in Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher’s *The Maid’s Tragedy* and Philip Massinger’s *The Roman Actor* usurp the prerogatives of the male favourite. I will then develop this analysis by exploring how these ‘sexual mistresses’ usurp the very masculinity of the ruler, a usurpation that is primarily achieved through the lapse of the ruler into effeminizing tyranny, as well as usurping the masculinity of other male characters who prove powerless to avenge the wrongs done to them by a tyrant. The result is a ‘ruler’s mistress’ usurping the role of avenger in the manner of Hamlet or Vindice – not an officially recognised role at court but nevertheless a usurpation of the masculine responsibilities belonging to male courtiers in legitimate governmental, social or military positions.

As I noted in my introductory chapter, I define a ‘mistress’ as a woman engaged in a relationship with a man with whom she is prepared to have sex outside the confines of marriage, an emerging definition that was gaining some traction in the early modern imagination but not yet fully stabilised in this period. As such, I focus on female characters who occupy the cultural and social space of the ‘modern mistress’. A ‘ruler’s mistress’ distinguishes herself from the mass through the identity of the man with whom she has a relationship. I selected these plays since they all depict at least one woman whose relationship with the ruler is, or was, either extra-marital or sufficiently ambiguous to warrant inclusion in the pantheon of ‘rulers’ mistresses’. *The True Tragedie of Richard III* features

Shore's Wife, a married woman who nonetheless conducted a sexual relationship with the similarly married King Edward IV. In *The Maid's Tragedy*, the dramatists indicate that the King's relationship with his lover Evadne began when neither was apparently married; nonetheless, it was an illicit relationship that the King attempted to further conceal from public opprobrium by arranging a marriage of convenience between Evadne and an unwitting courtier. The playwrights do not indicate why the King chose not to wed his lover, but it is obvious that their sexual union was not official or legally sanctioned in any way that allowed her to be retroactively identified as anything other than the King's 'mistress' in its modern meaning. *The Roman Actor* portrays three courtly women who reveal themselves to have had sexual congress with either former or current emperors to whom they were not wed, situating them comfortably in the category of 'sexual mistress'. The current object of the reigning Emperor's affections, however, is less easily characterised than these other women, primarily because the emperor supposedly dissolved her marriage to a senator under the assumption that his will as ruler is above the law; furthermore, he frequently identifies her as his wife and empress following the dissolution of her prior marriage. The dubious legality of the Emperor's actions in dismantling Domitia's marriage renders his subsequent identification of her as his wife extremely suspect, as evidenced by several characters' refusal to perceive Domitia as anything other than Lamia's wife. Toward the end of the play, Domitia herself indicates that her relationship with Domitian is not legally sanctioned, thus rendering it illegitimate. Through a careful examination of the characters' actions and reactions concerning the ruler's pursuit of his lover, I argue that Domitia deserves inclusion in the category of

‘mistress’. I will expand further on my reasoning for this decision in a later section.

I structure this chapter around the different prerogatives or roles that are usurped by the mistress at the ruler’s court. The first section will centre on the prerogatives of a queen and how the mistress usurps these prerogatives to act as a benevolent intercessor between the King and his subjects. As I have noted, I will analyse one late sixteenth-century play for this section: *The True Tragedie of Richard the Third*. In the second section of the chapter I will examine two later plays so as to explore a more troubling usurpation of prerogatives than that of the queen. The ‘mistresses’ in the Jacobean play *The Maid’s Tragedy* and the Caroline drama *The Roman Actor* all usurp the prerogatives of a ruler’s favourite, a usurpation that was substantially more threatening than that which occurred in the Elizabethan play because it allowed them access to a political influence that was outside the domestic sphere to which women traditionally belonged. The final section of this chapter focuses on the ‘sexual mistress’s’ usurpation of the ruler’s masculinity and/or that of his male subjects, a usurpation that was closely connected to that of the ruler’s favourite; the ‘mistresses’ under discussion in this section are *The Maid’s Tragedy*’s Evadne and *The Roman Actor*’s Domitia.

Criticism of the Jane Shore narrative has primarily focused on its dramatic appeal throughout the early modern period, in particular the ways in which her story was adapted in response to different social and political conditions that relied on this narrative to ‘express’ and ‘define’ cultural ‘tensions’.¹⁶³ According

¹⁶³ Richard Helgerson, ‘Weeping for Jane Shore’, *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 98 (1999), pp. 451-476 (p. 452).

to Wendy Wall, the play ‘explores the means by which a culture remembers’, as well as exploring Jane Shore’s ideological association with the city and domesticity which is threatened by the abuse of royal prerogative.¹⁶⁴ My research expands on this cultural understanding of Jane Shore as the city’s patron, examining how her power to act for her fellow citizens comes from her usurpation of the queen’s prerogatives. Meanwhile, *The Maid’s Tragedy* has been the subject of considerable critical attention, much of which focuses on the ‘mistress’ character Evadne. William Shullenberger (1982) argues that this play ‘tells of a crisis in the Renaissance world order’ through its portrayal of royal authority and the abuse thereof: ‘This order is threatened from within, by a kind of libidinal explosion whose epicenter is the king himself’.¹⁶⁵ He alludes to Evadne’s anomalous position within the social hierarchy as a mistress when he asserts that ‘[t]he hierarchy holds no mystique over her; she values it insofar as it helps her to secure her own place’ (Shullenberger, p. 148); I will explore the manner in which she goes about ‘secur[ing] her own place’ in this chapter. Philip J. Finkelpearl’s contribution to this field similarly focuses on the conduct of the King and various characters’ ‘responses [...] to the dictates of a monarch with divine right pretensions’, but the centre of his study is Amintor rather than Evadne.¹⁶⁶ These two studies skirt around the subject of tyranny and Evadne’s exploitation of the

¹⁶⁴ Wendy Wall, ‘Forgetting and Keeping: Jane Shore and the English Domestication of History’, *Renaissance Dramatic Culture*, 27 (1996), pp. 123-156 (p. 127).

¹⁶⁵ William Shullenberger, ‘“This For the Most Wrong’d of Women”: A Reappraisal of *The Maid’s Tragedy*’, *Renaissance Drama*, 13 (1982), pp. 131-156 (p. 134).

¹⁶⁶ Philip J. Finkelpearl, *Court and Country Politics in the Plays of Beaumont and Fletcher* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 184.

opportunities afforded her as ‘royal mistress’, but it is Lisa Hopkins who addresses the playwrights’ depiction of fraught masculinity in *The Maid’s Tragedy*.

Lisa Hopkins argues that despite male efforts to the contrary, ‘attempts to separate masculinity from femininity [in the play] are radically compromised at every turn’.¹⁶⁷ The male characters are keen to distance masculinity and femininity, to continually reinforce their difference as a means to bolster masculinity and the power that accompanies this gender identity by ‘othering’ women; however, in the process they unwittingly reveal the vulnerability and permeability of their categories. Hopkins claims that the female characters ‘resist such attempts to define them as essentially separate, choosing instead to appropriate the language of the masculine sphere’ (Hopkins, p. 62), an argument which I will develop by examining how Evadne in particular appropriates male *roles* and identities in her society. Adrienne L. Eastwood also engages with issues of masculinity, noting that Evadne’s ‘assertiveness [...] challenges the established categories of masculine and feminine [...] [s]he makes a legitimate case for female appropriation of masculine prerogative’.¹⁶⁸ She therefore addresses one of the areas that I cover in this chapter, but her research proceeds from a flawed understanding of Evadne’s social role: I disagree with her assertion that Evadne is a single woman, and she definitely is not in the same mould as Moll Cutpurse in *The Roaring Girl*. It is her position as a ‘mistress’ who has no

¹⁶⁷ Lisa Hopkins, *The Female Hero in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 46.

¹⁶⁸ Adrienne L. Eastwood, ‘Controversy and the Single Woman in *The Maid’s Tragedy* and *The Roaring Girl*’, *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, 58 (2004), pp. 7-27 (p. 14).

clearly articulated role at court that enables her to appropriate masculine prerogatives, and such appropriation is necessarily *illegitimate*.

The Roman Actor has been subject to fewer critical studies than *The Maid's Tragedy*, but those critics who do analyse this play primarily focus on its metatheatricity and its depiction of tyranny, drawing parallels between Massinger's depiction of Domitian and the conduct of Charles and their comparable infatuation with 'favourites'. For instance, Douglas Howard claims that Massinger deliberately 'blackened the picture of Domitian' in order to clarify 'the justice of his final punishment',¹⁶⁹ despite the playwright's 'reluctan[ce] to see the individual take the law [...] into his own hands' (Howard, p. 126). He does briefly refer to the female characters in the play, noting that '[t]he most important change in Massinger's vision of the conspiracy [...] is the addition of the three women' (Howard, p. 125), but that is the extent of his engagement with the women in *The Roman Actor*. Martin Butler declares the play's engagement with ideas of tyranny and absolutism comprised a critique of Charles I's rule, a notion disputed by Richard A. Burt in 1988.¹⁷⁰ Although compelling, Burt's analysis (like Howard's) only really addresses the female characters in their role

¹⁶⁹ Douglas Howard, 'Massinger's Political Tragedies', in *Philip Massinger: A Critical Reassessment*, ed. by Douglas Howard (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 117-138 (p. 124).

¹⁷⁰ Martin Butler, 'Romans in Britain: *The Roman Actor* and the Early Stuart Classical Play', in *Philip Massinger: A Critical Reassessment*, ed. by Douglas Howard, pp. 139-170; Richard A. Burt, ' "'Tis Writ by Me": Massinger's *The Roman Actor* and the Politics of Reception in the English Renaissance Theatre', *Theatre Journal*, 40 (1988), pp. 332-346.

as assassins, claiming that their rebellion is significant as it shows the limits of Domitian's theatrical authority.¹⁷¹

Ira Clark explores the validity of 'the world-stage analogy' in *The Roman Actor*, and in the process he bestows some much-needed critical attention on the character of Domitia.¹⁷² He writes that both Domitian and Domitia '[claim] the capacity to direct others in *The Roman Actor* as if characters acting out what the goddess or god produces on a stage of desire' (Clark, p. 72), thus hinting at Domitia's usurpation of Domitian's power to direct the world but not exploring any further. Joanne Rochester (2010) combines the approaches of Burt and Clark in her recent *Staging Spectatorship in the Plays of Philip Massinger* while Marissa Greenberg (2011) focuses on the theatrical function of the play, and in neither study are the female characters addressed in any meaningful way.¹⁷³ This chapter will rectify this critical neglect. I will begin by establishing what prerogatives traditionally belonged to these court insiders, and I will then explore how the relevant dramatists portrayed the mistress's usurpation of the prerogatives or role of these individuals. As I mentioned above, *The True Tragedie* is the first play chronologically and it depicts the ruler's mistress's

¹⁷¹ Burt, p. 339.

¹⁷² Ira Clark, *The Moral Art of Philip Massinger* (London: Associated University Presses, 1993), p. 67.

¹⁷³ Joanne Rochester, *Staging Spectatorship in the Plays of Philip Massinger* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Marissa Greenberg, 'The Tyranny of Tragedy: Catharsis in England and *The Roman Actor*', *Renaissance Drama*, 39 (2011), pp. 163-196. See also Andrew James Hartley, 'Philip Massinger's *The Roman Actor* and The Semiotics of Censored Theater', *ELH*, 68 (2001), pp. 359-376.

usurpation of the Queen's prerogatives; I will therefore start with a brief overview of what powers and responsibilities belong to this position before demonstrating how Shore's Wife usurps them in the anonymous play.

1. a) The Prerogatives of a Queen

In 1382, the citizens of London presented the following bill to Queen Anne, wife of Richard II: 'The city of London make supplication that [...] your most clement and pre-eminent nobility thus to mediate by gracious words and deeds with our lord the king'.¹⁷⁴ This supplication clarifies one of the central functions of a medieval and early modern queen, a position which included numerous duties but few as public and potent as that of intercessor. However, despite an apparent lack of opportunities for the queen consort to wield influence within the political realm outside of the nursery and ceremonial appearances, various scholars have unearthed a myriad of patronage networks and efforts at self-promotion and expression that were exploited by queens of England and abroad, all of which rendered them anything but powerless. I will avoid the dubious critical practice that James Daybell acknowledges: namely, the way in which scholars explore the role of '[w]omen connected to male monarchs – wives, mistresses, mothers, daughters and kin' without 'attributing too much

¹⁷⁴ *Calendar of Select Pleas and Memoranda of the City of London, parts 1381-1412*, ed. by A. H. Thomas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), p. 7.

power, influence and agency to women'.¹⁷⁵ This collection of essays valuably underlines that early modern politics included activities in which women were pivotal, such as patronage, alliances and the creation of a dynasty – an argument also made by McManus in specific reference to the oft-neglected Queen Anna.

Clare McManus expands on the role of Queens Anna and Henrietta Maria in her later work, observing that the status of queen consorts during this period were often in flux and dependent upon the relative power of the Kings' favourites.¹⁷⁶ My research will expand on this theme, examining the competition for power that occurs between queen and 'sexual mistress,' or the 'female favourite', in theatrical treatments of the court. This chapter will illustrate how queenly activities may be usurped by a 'ruler's mistress' and why this role may prove attractive to a woman whose illegitimacy at the centre of power could render her ignored and impotent; usurping queenly prerogatives and the power that accompanies it prevents a ruler's extra-marital sexual partner from being confined to the shadows of the bedroom. Furthermore, I will revisit the notion that 'royal and elite women shaped their identities through a complex intersection of discourses of class, gender, opposition and the appropriation of masculine courtly practices' (*Women and Culture*, p. 5), demonstrating how the 'sexual mistress' navigated these discourses and usurped specifically male courtly practices. I will

¹⁷⁵ James Daybell, 'Introductions: Rethinking Women and Politics in Early Modern England', in *Women and Politics in Early Modern England, 1450-1700* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 1-20 (p.1).

¹⁷⁶ Clare McManus, 'Introduction: the Queen's Court', in *Women and Culture at the Courts of the Stuart Queens*, ed. by McManus (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 2003), pp.1-18 (p. 4).

develop this reasoning, however, by proving that she appropriates not just masculine practices but masculinity itself.

Scholarly research into the early modern woman frequently intersects with the study of queenship, as evidenced by McManus's research into the overlapping fields of performance, women, and Queen Anna of Denmark. It is an especially intriguing field considering the plethora of female rulers or power players in early modern Europe, and the inevitable questions about women's access to political or personal power during this period. Susan Frye's research is illuminating, ranging from explorations of the political and personal significance of the traditionally female activity of needlework to an analysis of Elizabeth I's control over her public persona.¹⁷⁷ Frye explores Elizabeth's control of her self-image, her 'agency' in this field competing with social discourses that attempted to categorize her themselves.¹⁷⁸ This work engages with the early modern woman's desire to establish her own identity, a theme to which I will return throughout this thesis. Her later work moves beyond just Elizabeth's efforts to control her image; she focuses instead on female society at large and their efforts as self-representation and expression, specifically through their manipulation of textiles. Yet even engagement in the traditionally 'safe' female activity of needlework could be sexualised in misogynist discourse, as Frye demonstrates through an analysis of *Othello* and *Cymbeline*.

¹⁷⁷ Susan Frye, *Pens and Needles: Women's Textualities in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

¹⁷⁸ Susan Frye, *Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Other critical readings that have influenced my analysis include Carole Levin's observation that, despite Machiavelli's efforts to distinguish between the public and private morality of rulers, the early modern community was concerned with the sexual conduct of a ruler as an indicator of their capacity to govern.¹⁷⁹ In a later work she argues that the emergence during Henry VIII's reign of the notion that the King was God's lieutenant on earth allowed for a queen regnant; the office had been elevated so far beyond regular societal norms that traditional rules concerning women's inferiority were not as stringent.¹⁸⁰ She accurately remarks that Elizabeth utilised traditional gender expectations to her political benefit but also elevated herself above them when necessary. I would suggest that Elizabeth's position as monarch allowed her to usurp the masculine qualities that traditionally accompanied such a title; only by recognising her as surpassing gender in her role as the divinely-appointed ruler could the early modern people reconcile her unfortunate gender with her male power. This balance had to be maintained between her identity as a woman and as a monarch but, as Frye had noted earlier, Elizabeth had limited control over the public image. Indeed, Jean Howard observes that while '[r]epresentations have ideological implications, [...]

¹⁷⁹ Carole Levin, '“Lust being Lord, there is no trust in kings”: Passion, King John, and the Responsibilities of Kingship', in *Sexuality and Politics in Renaissance Drama*, ed. by Levin and Karen Robertson (Lampeter: E. Mellen, 1991), pp. 255-278 (p. 265).

¹⁸⁰ Carole Levin, *The heart and stomach of a king”: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).

they are not completely in anyone's control'.¹⁸¹ Levin also makes the pivotal point that '[i]n accusing the queen of sexual improprieties, people were charging her with dishonourable behavior in a way that would not be the case in a similar rumor about a king' (Levin, p.76). I contend that such efforts to nullify Elizabeth as ruler through the denigration of her chastity were not confined to her but affected all women whose access to power is controversial, including a 'ruler's mistress'.

Natalie Mears responds to Levin's arguments by praising her efforts to recapture the common perception of Elizabeth, but suggests that her work 'is problematic because she assumes a consciousness and deliberate manipulation of gendered imagery by Elizabeth I and her subjects that is [...] anachronistically modern'.¹⁸² She is unconvinced by such feminist readings and disagrees with Levin's contention 'that gender lay at the heart of public debate on Elizabeth's queenship, contributing particularly to allegations of sexual misconduct' (Mears, p.223). Instead, she identifies religion as the determining factor in this debate. Elizabeth's illegitimacy and heresy made her corruptible and corrupting, not her gender, and the gender-based insults that were levelled at her were indicative of the 'limited vocabulary for criticising women' (Mears, p. 228) rather than an

¹⁸¹ Jean E. Howard, 'Staging the Absent Woman: The Theatrical Evocation of Elizabeth Tudor in Heywood's *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody, Part I*', in *Women Players in England, 1500-1600: Beyond the All-Male Stage*, ed. by Pamela Allen Brown and Peter Parolin (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 263-280 (p. 279).

¹⁸² Natalie Mears, *Queenship and Political Discourse in the Elizabethan Realms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 5-6.

explicit public antipathy toward her gender as a monarch. I agree with her contention about the limited vocabulary for transgressive women, but Levin correctly identifies the significance of Elizabeth's gender in debates about her queenship; her religion and her gender were inextricably linked in the early modern imagination, as demonstrated through the efforts of various councillors to press suitors of disparate religious backgrounds onto the unmarried queen in the hope that a husband would steady her in matters of religion and balance her feminine changeableness. Mears also focuses on how Elizabeth resembled her cousin James in her personal reliance on individuals rather than the Privy Council in formulating policy, but as a woman her practice of seeking counsel from male members of court was more acceptable than similar behaviour in a king – thus confirming Levin's point about the importance of the monarch's gender in analyses of rulership.

In the field of queenly performance, Karen Britland develops McManus's research concerning the utility of these court performances by challenging previous critical perceptions of Henrietta Maria as frivolous; she correctly identifies the Queen Consort's courtly entertainments and displays as a means of political expression.¹⁸³ Griffey also utilises David Starkey's ideas regarding the politics of intimacy so she may accentuate the significance of female networks and influence at court, a significant forum for female expressions of agency and power from which the 'sexual mistress' – through her sexual illegitimacy – was

¹⁸³ Karen Britland, *Drama at the Courts of Queen Henrietta Maria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 116.

primarily excluded.¹⁸⁴ The principal queenly role that a ruler's extra-marital sexual partner could perform, however, was that of patron and intercessor, and since the role of patron and the act of interceding were inextricably linked (the 'mistress' patronised her 'clients' by interceding with the ruler for them) I will focus on the more public and symbolically significant of the two.

In her role as intercessor, the Queen utilized her unique intimacy with the King to assuage his anger or prevent the implementation of harsh measures against his subjects. Queen Philippa of Hainault famously went on bended knee before her husband to effect the release of the Calais burghers, and Richard II's wife Queen Anne was similarly believed to have interceded with her husband when he stripped the city of London of its privileges. As a contemporary commentator, Richard Maidstone, noted in a poem (1392) celebrating the reconciliation of the King with the city and his accompanying procession through its streets,

[t]he queen is able to deflect the king's firm rule,

So he will show a gentle face to his own folk.

A woman soothes a man by love: God gave him her.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ See David Starkey, 'Intimacy and innovation: the rise of the Privy Chamber, 1485-1547', in *The English Court: from the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War*, by David Starkey, D. A. L. Morgan, John Murphy and Others (New York: Longman Group, 1987), pp. 71-118.

¹⁸⁵ Richard Maidstone, 'Concordia (The Reconciliation of Richard II with London)', ed. by David R. Carlson, trans. by A. G. Rigg, in *Robbins Library Digital Projects* <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/>> [accessed 2 January 2016].

This act of interceding with a king became ritualized as the years went on. A queen's pleas for the subjects were often employed as a means for the king to demonstrate his clemency without undermining his authority: 'the queen's merciful love could move her husband to show his human side in what was effectively a skilful division of psychological labour: she could melt the king's heart without making him appear weak or indecisive'.¹⁸⁶ Such an act can be seen in Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII* Act One scene two, in which Queen Katherine successfully pleads with the eponymous King to forgive his rebellious subjects. The Queen's influence was likewise sought in matters of patronage, where her approval and support for a project would change a client's life; through her, they had a connection to the head of the kingdom.

The Queen's role as intercessor was evidently celebrated and fetishized amongst the medieval and early modern subjects who benefitted from such mediation. However, her influence on the King, though ritualized and to an extent institutionalised, was predicated on her supposedly unique emotional connection to the ruler and her access to him – and a 'mistress' in her modern meaning could claim similar privileges to the wife in this respect, the illicit and unofficial nature of her relationship with the ruler notwithstanding. Kathleen Wellman argues that in Renaissance France, 'the queen and the mistress occupied complementary positions': 'The queen had legitimate authority, while the mistress exercised power only through the king's favor [... T]he queen had a sanctified marriage, tying her to morality and tradition, whereas the mistress's relationship was illicit

¹⁸⁶ Lisa Hilton, *Queens Consort: England's Medieval Queens* (London: Phoenix, 2009), p. 4.

and thus morally problematic'.¹⁸⁷ The 'ruler's mistress' is an illegitimate presence at court for her romantic connection with the king is not sanctified by matrimony and as a woman she cannot be allowed any official political sway; nonetheless, as a woman who could potentially usurp the role and prerogatives of the royal spouse in the bedchamber, it is not impossible for her also to usurp the role and prerogatives of the intercessory Queen in her interactions with the King.

According to Wellman, such was the case with one of Henri IV's mistresses, Gabrielle d'Estrées: Henry presented Gabrielle as an appropriate future queen and, to the consternation of many, blurred the distinction between queen and mistress (Wellman, p. 16). I contend that the theatrical representation of a woman occupying the cultural space of 'modern mistress' focuses on her access to the monarch, and it is this access which allows her to act as a mediator between her lover and his irate subjects, particularly those who seek her aid specifically; if she chooses to accept such responsibility, then she is actively usurping the prerogatives (and thus role) of the Queen. I will now demonstrate how one Elizabethan dramatist explored this usurpation of queenly prerogative through the character of Elizabeth 'Jane' Shore, the 'sexual mistress' of Edward IV.

b) Usurping Queenly Prerogative in *The True Tragedie of Richard III*

Much like the later and more famous *Richard III* by William Shakespeare, the anonymous *The True Tragedie of Richard III* (1588-94) delineates the rise and fall of the notorious King following the demise of his brother King Edward IV.

¹⁸⁷Kathleen Wellman, *Queens and Mistresses of Renaissance France* (London: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 6.

Unlike Shakespeare's work, however, this play includes the character of Shore's Wife, the 'sexual mistress' of Edward IV. Based upon the historical personage Elizabeth Shore, Shore's Wife in the *True Tragedie* suffers at the hands of Richard once her royal protector has died. Shore's Wife recognizes that her intimacy with the king had been advantageous and that his infatuation with his extra-marital sexual partner meant that she wanted for nothing: 'Of any thing, yea were it halfe his reuenewes, / I know his grace would not see me want (*The True Tragedie of Richard III*, I.3.217-18). The rest of this speech focuses on pragmatic matters, acknowledging her personal, political, and financial vulnerability should her royal protector die: 'I haue left me nothing now to comfort me withal, / And then those that are my foes will triumph at my fall (3.221-22). She also regrets that she had failed adequately to prepare for a future without Edward. Her fears come to fruition once her royal lover has gone, leaving her exposed to her 'enemies' (3.257) which unfortunately includes the new royal protector, the future Richard III:

Ah me, then comes my ruine and decaie,

For he could neuer abide me to the death,

No he alwaies hated me whom his brother loued so well (3.268-70).

Her worries are warranted, as before the end of the play Shore's Wife will be forced to endure a humiliating public penance and a lonely death abandoned by all.

Shore's Wife's lamentation over Edward's illness includes one key phrase that is significant to my argument in this chapter:

For thou knowest this Hursly, I haue bene good to all,

And still readie to preferre my friends,

To what preferment I could (3.213-15)

Coupled with the line '[f]or what was it his grace would deny Shores wife' (3.216), this passage reveals that, as royal mistress, Shore's Wife could politically influence the King. After Lodowick has delivered the bad news, the former King's paramour reminds the audience that she will now be abandoned by those who have benefited from her access to the king:

Those whom I haue done most good, will now forsake me.

Ah Hursly, when I entertained thee first,

I was farre from change, so was I Lodwicke,

When I restored thee thy lands (3.251-4).

Evidently both Hursly and Lodowick have benefited from Shore's Wife's position, but Lodowick in particular seems to have received some form of official favour through the royal mistress. The word 'restored' implies that the man or his family had lost their lands, probably through legal means or royal disfavour. Indeed, it was not uncommon for the children of traitors to lose their family's property through an Act of Attainder, and only the monarch's personal forgiveness could allow them to reclaim their patrimony. The difficulty would be gaining access to the ruler and beseeching him to return the lands himself, and to do so would require an intermediary. The implication in this scene is that either Lodowick sought Shore's Wife to intercede with the King on his behalf for the return of his lands, or she sought their return on her own initiative. This is confirmed in a later scene when the former 'royal mistress' reminds Lodowick of

his debt to her: 'I am she that begged thy lands of King Edward the fourth (11.1068-9). She enabled their return by acting as mediatrix, proving she 'is able to deflect the king's firm rule / So he will show a gentle face to his own folk'. These words are quoted from Richard Maidstone's poem regarding the function of the queen as intercessor with her husband, and their evident application to Shore's Wife demonstrates that she has usurped the Queen's role as intercessor.

There is further evidence that Shore's Wife acted as intercessor between the King and his subjects in *True Tragedie*, and an audience is not required to accept her word on that. Later Cardinal Morton and a Citizen discuss the myriad ways in which they are indebted to Edward's lover:

MORTON: Marry sir it is mistresse Shore,

To whom I am more beholding too for my seruice,

Than the deerest friend that euer I had.

CITIZEN: And I for my sonnes pardon. (11.310-13).

Morton's personal debt may initially appear vague, but the Citizen clearly articulates that Shore's Wife had sought a pardon for his son, noting that she did 'saue the life of [his] sonne' (11.1125 -6). In so doing, he makes explicit what is implicit in Lodowick's case – namely that Shore's Wife personally addressed this matter with the King and managed to soften his resolve against another of his subjects; the type of pardon she sought for the citizen's son could only come from the monarch himself. These subjects, ranging from a mere citizen to a member of the inner court circle (Morton), have asked the 'King's mistress' to intercede with their monarch and she has not disappointed them. Notably, they do not credit the Queen with such endeavours, and traditionally it was her role to act as mediatrix

or intercessor. The Citizen's later claim that if she had not saved his son 'another vvould' (11.1126) is petulant in the extreme, as evidenced by his subsequent comment: 'and for my part, I vvould he had bene hangd seuen yeeres ago, it had saued me a great deale of mony then' (11.1126-8). Only someone willing to accept such petitions from suitors like the Citizen and one who had intimate access to and emotional influence over the monarch could have achieved such a pardon – namely the 'King's mistress' or his wife. This usurpation of the Queen's role is accentuated by a crude pun made by the Citizen: 'let vs go in, & let the quean alone' (11.28-9). 'Quean' may be a synonym for 'whore', but it is also a homonym for 'queen', allowing the Citizen to simultaneously condemn Shore's Wife as sexually immoral while subconsciously acknowledging her as an unofficial 'queen' in her role as intercessor. Clearly, Shore's Wife has usurped the Queen's position and prerogatives.

The Queen in *The True Tragedie* has a smaller role than her namesake in Shakespeare's *Richard III* but a larger one than in *Edward IV*. Her presentation acts as a potent comparison to Shore's Wife, evident from her very first line: 'Ay me poore husbandless queene, & you poore fatherlesse princes' (9.792).

Immediately her speech echoes Shore's Wife repeated 'Ah's while highlighting the misery and danger she faces now she has lost her male protector. Moreover, the conversation between the Queen and her daughter consists of the former lamenting the danger she faces now the King is dead while her conversation partner endeavours to reassure her that her other male allies will support her: 'Why mother he is a Prince, and in hands of our two vnckles, Earle Riuers, & Lord Gray, who wil no doubt be carefull of his estate' (9.798-800). This recalls Shore's Wife's conversation with Hursly and Lodowick as she laments Edward's

(imminent) passing as they attempt to reassure her that her male friends will continue to support her: ‘Why mistress Shore, for the losse of one friend, / Will you abandon the rest that wish you well?’ (3.260-1). Both the Queen and the ‘mistress-character’s’ social positions are radically affected by this loss, and notably both women endure a form of banishment. The Queen’s self-imposed inurement in sanctuary reflects Shore’s Wife’s exile from court, and Richard is later determined to present both women as threats to his power when he attacks the one man willing to protect them simultaneously:

RICHARD: Come bring him away, let this suffice, thou and that accursed
sorceresse the mother Queene hath bewitched me, with
assistance of that famous strumpet of my brothers, Shores wife:
(10.943-5).

The consistent parallel drawn between the two women who were sexually involved with the ruler accentuates the impression of Shore's Wife's usurpation of the Queen Consort's role and prerogatives.

One other facet of the Queen's depiction is worth noting, specifically how her role in the play is to worry about her children's future. She even argues that her grief is solely about their prospects: 'Ah poore Princes, my mourning is for you and for your brother, who is gone vp to an vntimely crowndation' (9.796-7). As such, the dramatist reiterates her position as Dowager Queen and imminent Queen Mother, both legitimate social positions that give her continued authority and relevance in society. This power is demonstrated in scene twenty following Richard's defeat as her daughter answers Richmond's marriage suit thus: 'Then know my Lord, that if my mother please, I must in dutie yeeld to her command'

(20.2110-11). The Queen responds with this formal acceptance: 'Then here my Lord, receuie thy royall spouse, virtuous Elizabeth, for both the Peeres and Commons do agree, that this faire Princesse shall be wife to thee'(20.2114-17). The Queen is thus portrayed as a continuing player in the political and social scene through her position as mother to the rightful heirs to the throne; combined with her title of Queen Dowager, the legitimacy of the Queen's position at court and in society is repeatedly reaffirmed and it is this legitimacy that gives her continued authority in the negotiations regarding her child's royal marriage. This authority is lost to Shore's Wife as it was only usurped during her tenure as 'royal mistress' and lost once she loses her bedfellow.

What is demonstrated most clearly in these plays is the vulnerability of a 'ruler's mistress' once she is abandoned by her lover. Shore's Wife is deprived of royal protection and support when Edward dies, his mortality rendering her vulnerable to the enmity of the Duke of Gloucester and any others who had resented her personal influence over and intimacy with the King. Such vulnerability illustrates how her position as 'royal mistress' is an illegitimate one, for there are no protections or future for her save through becoming the 'sexual mistress' of another (Hastings) or through the pity of her former 'friends'. A Queen Consort would acquire the title/social position of Dowager Queen and widow; there is no future for a 'ruler's mistress' unless others accept her in another role, and notably few wish to if she has made enemies or if doing so would be political suicide. Jane Shore in Heywood's *Edward IV* has the same problem, although she is partially redeemed through her husband's forgiveness and recognition of his straying spouse. Throughout *Edward IV* the playwright includes Jane's cuckolded husband as a central character and repeatedly portrays

Jane's inner turmoil at betraying him with the King. In *The True Tragedie*, Jane Shore may be identified as Shore's wife but she only exists in the play as Edward's 'mistress' and his former 'mistress', minus a brief dalliance as Hastings's paramour. She does not exist as wife or daughter, only as the sexual partner of the ruler and then as a woman ruined once she loses her sexual partner.

In summary, *The True Tragedie of Richard III* depicts a famous and popular 'royal mistress' who utilized her influence and intimacy with her lover to act as a mediator between him and his subjects. This intercessory role is traditionally the privilege of the Queen, the legitimate bedfellow of the monarch whose intimacy and union with the King is sanctified and, supposedly, unique, allowing her to mitigate the potential severity of her spouse and allow him to show mercy without appearing weak before his subjects. However, the Queen's supposed intimacy and access to the monarch is not unique when the King has a 'mistress' in the modern meaning, and *The True Tragedie* represents Edward IV's 'mistress' as the one possessing and wielding the power to influence the king. By assuming this role of royal intercessor, the 'sexual mistress' has usurped the prerogatives of the Queen, a usurpation that would be more troubling were it not fundamentally benign; by seeking mercy and pardons, this 'ruler's mistress' is not attempting to control or manipulate the King on public policy and she is not treading on traditionally masculine prerogatives. Consequently, the dramatist represents the character of a 'ruler's mistress' as one occupying an illegitimate space at court that she negotiates by usurping the role of the Queen, an illegitimate usurpation but one that does not undercut the largely favourable impression created by the character of Shore's Wife. Plays from later in the early modern period were not inclined to depict the 'ruler's mistress' so benevolently,

preferring to present a character that usurped traditionally masculine roles within the political and social arena. These 'sexual mistresses' were therefore more threatening, and I will continue by exploring the representation of 'rulers' mistresses' who usurp the prerogatives of councillor or favourite after delineating what exactly those prerogatives were.

2. Usurping the Role of the Councillor and Favourite

This section of the chapter will focus on discourses of counsel in early modern England as well as offering a discussion of the role of royal favourites within the political sphere. I will begin by assessing the early modern understanding of political counsel and the dangers contained therein, extending that analysis to include the question of a ruler's favourites and their influence on the ruler. I will establish that polemicists considered political counsel invaluable but the accompanying concerns that a ruler may become too reliant upon one councillor meant that any single person with too much influence over the ruler became a 'favourite', someone who was dangerous and must be dealt with. I contend that a 'ruler's mistress' could parlay her access and intimacy with the ruler into a political influence that was not limited to the usurped role of intercessor. These 'sexual mistresses' who usurp the prerogatives of councillor and favourite are exerting influence in the masculine sphere of politics and thus rendering themselves a threat to the patriarchal community. I will demonstrate that in *The Maid's Tragedy* and *The Roman Actor*, the respective dramatists portrayed the 'ruler's mistress' actively usurping the role of royal councillor and favourite.

a) The Role of Counsel and Councillors

Two of the most renowned scholars of the early modern period were united in their praise for the role of political counsel. In 1516 Erasmus declared that '[a] country owes everything to a good prince; but it owes the prince himself to the one whose right counsel has made him what he is'.¹⁸⁸ Sir Francis Bacon supported Erasmus's conclusions in his essay 'Of Counsel': '[t]he wisest princes need not think it any diminution to their greatness, or derogation to their sufficiency, to rely upon counsel'.¹⁸⁹ Indeed, as Niccolò Machiavelli noted, '[t]he first thing one does to evaluate a ruler's prudence is to look at the men he has around him' and thus determine his wisdom as a ruler through his 'selection' of the worthy or unworthy as 'ministers'.¹⁹⁰ He further advises 'the prince' that he

should be mindful of the minister so as to keep him acting well, honouring him, making him rich, putting him in his debt, giving him a share of the honours and responsibilities; so that the minister recognizes that he cannot exist without the prince (Machiavelli, p. 80).

As Jacqueline Rose notes in her essay 'Kingship and Counsel in Early Modern England', similar praise for the judicious use of counsel may be found in other contemporary works such as *Utopia* by Thomas More (also appearing in 1516)

¹⁸⁸ Desiderius Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince*, ed. by Lisa Jardine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 6.

¹⁸⁹ Francis Bacon, *Essays, Civil and Moral*, ed. by Charles W. Eliot, 50 vols (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1909-14), III www.bartleby.com/3/1/ [accessed 8 January 2016].

¹⁹⁰ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. and ed. by Peter Bondanella (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 79.

and *Dialogue between Pole and Lupset* (1532) by Thomas Starkey.¹⁹¹ She further remarks that '[t]he pre-eminent form of institutionalized counsel was parliament, the king's great council' (Rose, p. 50). Effective political counsel meant that a ruler was not required to be perfect and would not have to shoulder the burden of administering a kingdom alone, and it was a wise ruler who accepted the necessity of counsel.

However, the application of political counsel was not without its dangers, the chief of which was flattery. This occurs when a councillor, who should be 'faithful, and sincere, and plain, and direct' (Bacon), chooses to deceive or beguile his master – usually with an eye to his own advancement. Erasmus declares flattery to be one of the primary problems in the political community: 'by far the most dangerous [evil] is flattery. False accusation turns the prince against a few people, but flattery casts a spell over him entirely' (Erasmus, p. 130). Machiavelli notes that a ruler can '[come] to ruin because of the flatterer' (Machiavelli, p. 81). As Rose observes, early modern polemicists 'used a classical dichotomy between flattery, appealing to the passions; and counsel, appealing to reason' (Rose, p. 68). Nonetheless, the threat that the flatterer presents to the stability of a government is negligible if his influence is balanced by honest councillors; the flatterer only becomes truly dangerous when he is favoured by the ruler above all others in his council – or even all other subjects in his kingdom. This leads me to the related field of the 'favourite', the subject who has a personal and political influence on the ruler beyond that of mere councillor. I will discuss

¹⁹¹ See Jacqueline Rose, 'Kingship and Counsel in Early Modern England', *The Historical Journal*, 54 (2011), pp. 47-71 (p. 49).

this topic in detail below, demonstrating that early modern scholars were aware of the threat posed by a royal favourite and that they advised their readership on how to mitigate the damage caused by the favourite's influence.

b) Favourites and the Ruler

Despite the vitriol often directed against favourites in early modern writings, it is worth noting that their rise was an inevitable consequence of the ideological baggage attached to the position of ruler. A king, duke or emperor ruled his particular domain, to all intents and purposes, alone. No subject or living family member could equal his status, and that deprived him of the most significant relationships available to a human being: the relationship between friends. According to Cicero, 'it is of the utmost importance in friendship that superior and inferior should stand on an equality'.¹⁹² Such sentiments were adopted by Erasmus in his proverbs '*[a]micorum communia omnia*' ('between friends all is common') and '*[a]micitia aequalitas. Amicus alter ipse*' ('friendship is equality. A friend is another self').¹⁹³ Ideologically, therefore, true friends had to be equals, which meant that any ruler is necessarily friendless because no one can match his social position. However, these ideological and social restrictions could not prevent a ruler from seeking some emotional companionship, even if it had to be from among his subjects.

¹⁹² Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Laelius De Amicitia*

<http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cicero/Laelius_de_Amicitia/text*.html>

[accessed 9 January 2016].

¹⁹³ Desiderius Erasmus, *Collected Works of Erasmus: Adages II1TOIV100* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), pp. 29-31.

In his book *Male Friendship in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, Tom MacFaul explores the tensions in early modern conceptions of (male) friendship; he establishes that the Ciceronian ideal of virtue in friendship was valued highly by humanists, although Aristotle found value in ‘friendships of pleasure or utility’.¹⁹⁴ In his study of friendship in relation to other social structures, MacFaul establishes that friendship was crucial to a man’s sense of identity, a way of avoiding ‘the “feminizing” influences of women’ (MacFaul, p. 3). This idea finds ample expression in *The Maid’s Tragedy*, as I will demonstrate below, providing as it does another instance of women’s exclusion from particular courtly relationships due to their social illegitimacy and gender – an exclusion that may necessitate the usurpation of masculinity.

MacFaul further observes that the once venerated ideal of male friendship was devalued by the late sixteenth century as the rhetoric of friendship was utilised by those seeking patronage or other advantages. It could now be perceived with scepticism, representing as it did to many that friendship was about social aspiration (MacFaul, p. 11). MacFaul expresses the ruler’s conundrum effectivity:

Kingship involves a crucial paradox regarding friendship: on the one hand the king needs supporters, ideally bound to him by bonds of genuine affection, as may really have happened with medieval kings; on the other hand, any particular friendship can be construed as excessive favour, and can therefore create jealous enemies who threaten the king’s position (MacFaul, pp. 116-7).

¹⁹⁴ Tom MacFaul, *Male Friendship in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 7.

The subject who becomes close to a ruler is therefore not a friend but a favourite, a form of ‘illegitimate friend’ to the ruler who possesses both influence over and access to the ruler. Such influence cannot be the result of a true friendship because of the inequality between them, and the favourite’s elevation would inevitably disgruntle other political players (particularly councillors) who are not similarly favoured. This discontent often manifested itself in written and verbal denunciations of the favourite as a corrupt influence on the ruler, and sometimes even the ruler himself faced veiled criticism for his preferences.

Early modern writings that acknowledged or studied the influence of rulers’ favourites are generally condemnatory. Francesco Guicciardini (1483-1540) describes the effect that favourites had on the ruler’s decisions during the wars in Italy. He relates how one Milanese emissary sought political access to and favour from the French king by ‘working particularly with sundry of his principal fauorits’, while he condemns Pietro de Medici’s choice in allowing his favourites to influence Florence’s policy.¹⁹⁵ The French King Charles is later condemned for his many political failings, one of which is was that he was ‘enuironed always with his familiars & fauorits, [and] he reteyned with them no maiestie or authoritie’ (p. 43 / D4^r)– thus diminishing his own authority over his subjects. William Prynne’s diatribe against Charles I’s governmental policy regarding Catholics suggests that the King’s favourites influenced his politics:

In pursuance of this design, his Majesties greatest Favourites, and those in highest authority under him, were all either actuall Papists in profession, or well

¹⁹⁵ Francesco Guicciardini, *The historie of Guicciardin conteining the vvarres of Italie and other partes* (London: 1579), p. 14/ B2^v.

inclined to Popery in affection, & altogether swayed by popish Councils:
witness the first *Grand Favōurite*, the Duke of *Buckingham*, who laid the
foundation of the Spanish and French Marriage-Treaties, Articles, and was a
chiefe Actor in both.¹⁹⁶

Evidently favourites were a much-lamented part of court life throughout the early modern period. They were frequently associated with a similarly lamented facet of court politics: factions.

In his 1992 essay, Robert Shephard highlights the three main reasons why factions came to exist in the sixteenth century: the disintegration of feudal loyalties and ties as the centralised government began to attract opportunists; the personal rule of a monarch; and the utility of access to that monarch to convey one's interests.¹⁹⁷ He also makes specific reference to favourites as significant players in the art of factions:

some faction leaders patronized men of widely divergent views, resulting in factions without a coherent position on issue of policy and / or religion. This was particularly true of royal favorites early in their careers (Shephard, p. 730).

The transitory nature of alliances surrounding favourites is apparent in early modern plays, including the 'mistress-favourite' that features in *The True Tragedie: Shore's Wife* does not have a strong political network; rather, she seems to have pursued compassionate whims that were not reciprocated once it

¹⁹⁶ William Prynne, *The Popish royall favourite* (London: 1643), p. 56/ H1 v.

¹⁹⁷ Robert Shephard, 'Court Factions in Early Modern England', *The Journal of Modern History*, 64 (1992), pp. 721-745 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2124905> [accessed 17 August 2017] (pp. 722-3).

becomes perilous to do so. Francis Bacon advises kings to ‘beware how they side themselves, and make themselves as of a faction or party; for leagues within the state are ever pernicious to monarchies’ (Bacon, LI, ‘Of Faction’). As I will demonstrate below, any ruler’s excessive emotional attachment to a favourite can upset this balance and, in the two plays discussed below, lead to rebellion.

Natalie Mears addresses the erstwhile neglect of women in studies of factions, concluding that previous research has focused too heavily on institutional forms of counsel (namely the Privy Council) and neglected informal alliances that constituted alternative means of advising a monarch.¹⁹⁸ Fortunately, scholars like McManus and Daybell have partially rectified this omission with their insightful studies of female networks of influence at court and in politics. Meanwhile, Nicholas Henshall helpfully elaborates on Shephard’s argument that a ruler must manage the factions at his court, providing examples of French and English monarchs who succeeded and failed.¹⁹⁹ Henshall remarks that the ‘royal response’ to factions was ‘the crucial determinant of politics’ (Henshall, p. 155), not the existence of factions themselves. Much as Henshall accentuates the ‘political convenience’ (Henshall, p. 155) that often characterised factional alliances, I will emphasise how frequently the ‘sexual mistress’ seeks personal

¹⁹⁸ Natalie Mears, ‘Courts, Courtiers, and Culture in Tudor England’, *The Historical Journal*, 46 (2003), pp. 703-722 <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X03003212>.

¹⁹⁹ Nicholas Henshall, *The Myth of Absolutism: Change and Continuity in Early Modern European Monarchy* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 155. See also Rubén González Cuerva and Valentina Caldari, eds., ‘The secret mechanisms of courts: Factions in early modern Europe’, *Libros de la Corte.es*. (2015), pp. 1-8 <http://hdl.handle.net/10486/667404>, [accessed 17 August 2017].

advancement through her access to the ruler. She could do little else, considering her vulnerability as an illegitimate presence at court.

Factional alliances were variable and frequently perceived as a corrupting influence on a ruler, much as the early modern favourite and the 'ruler's mistress' was perceived at court. Inevitably favourites and 'mistress-favourites' were heavily embedded in the discourse revolving around factions as their access to and intimacy with a ruler made them either prime conduits between a faction and the ruler, or a principal member of a faction that allows the favourite to forge a protective alliance against others who wish to displace them from the ruler's side. One 'ruler's mistress', that of Francis I of France, even became the leader of a faction in order to provide herself with protection following her lover's death. The ruler's favourite was therefore a familiar figure both to early modern political theorists and to the general population who kept abreast of their ruler's personal affairs. What is of particular importance to my study is that these relationships between rulers and favourites were usually couched in 'eroticized terms'.²⁰⁰ As Curtis Perry notes,

[t]he new emphasis upon the politics of intimacy enforced by the institution of the Privy Chamber contributed [...] to a Henrician court culture obsessed with eroticized scenarios of intimacy and access worked out in fictional and poetic fantasies of secret assignations and cunning court panders (Perry, p. 20).

The political and sexual thus became ever more tightly enmeshed. Many a courtier who appeared excessively high in the ruler's favour was frequently

²⁰⁰ Curtis Perry, *Literature and Favoritism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2006), p. 131.

considered his or her sexual partner, and the language of politics and sex inevitably found their way into any discussion of a favourite: 'The significance of erotic favouritism as a trope has to do, instead, with its remarkable prevalence as an unofficial language of corruption: no other scandalous conception of favouritism from the period is as ubiquitous' (Perry, p. 135). The early modern stage capitalised on this with several plays exploring the roles and lives of royal favourites.

This fascination with 'erotic favouritism' on the early modern stage required an audience's active engagement in the matter represented, and the principal method that dramatists used to capture the public's interest was to draw effective parallels between the strange and the familiar. There is evidence in both *The Maid's Tragedy* and *The Roman Actor* that indicates to the audience that they should perceive the supposedly foreign activities in Rhodes and Rome as actually representative of English customs. The most notable proof for this in the earlier play is the depiction of the court masque in Act One. Masques celebrating aristocratic marriages was an identifiably English custom familiar to courtly audiences and the public (the latter of whom experienced such entertainments vicariously through their echoes in plays such as *The Maid's Tragedy*); moreover, this particular masque evokes the marriage celebrations of the English aristocrats Frances Howard and the Earl of Essex. Similarly, the constant debates concerning the limits to a ruler's power in *The Roman Actor* echo the public and destructive political discourse that engulfed Charles I's increasingly entrenched battles with Parliament. On a basic level, the sheer preoccupation in England with the influence of favourites (both male and embodied in queens consort) on the successive Stuart kings meant that any portrayal of a ruler's vulnerability to the

machinations of courtiers or councillors would encourage an audience's identification of the courtly environments depicted with English courts.

c) Usurping the Role of Councillor and Favourite: *The Maid's Tragedy* (1610-11) and *The Roman Actor* (1626)

Evadne occupies the social and cultural space of the 'modern mistress' in *The Maid's Tragedy*, and I contend that she usurps the prerogatives of a royal favourite. She does not exert much of a political influence on the King but she does not hesitate to act authoritatively toward her supposed social superiors and she certainly expects the King's authority to shield her from harm at court. Furthermore, her reasons for engaging in an affair with the monarch are more in concert with those of the ambitious favourite than that of an infatuated woman. Evidence for both these contentions may be found in Act Three scene one.

Following the disastrous wedding night that both husband and wife have elected to keep secret, Evadne is challenged by her lover, the King, for her supposed infidelity with her husband:

thou hast taken oaths,

[...]

that thou wouldst nere injoy

A man but me. (*The Maid's Tragedy*, III.1.166-9).²⁰¹

²⁰¹ Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *The Maid's Tragedy*, ed. by Robert K. Turner, Jnr., in *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, gen. ed. Fredson Bowers, 10 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), II, pp. 1-166 (p. 69).

Her response is revealing:

I swore indeede that I would never love
A man of lower place, but if your fortune
Should throw you from this hight, I bad you trust
I would forsake you, and would bend to him
That won your throne, I love with my ambition,
Not with my eies (III.1.1171-6).

This is not a sexual relationship that just happens to be between courtier and king; Evadne sought power, and she found it by engaging the interests of the King. This ambition is characteristic of a royal favourite who trades on a ruler's affection for political advantage. Evadne is clear that her affection for the King is predicated on his supremacy in the kingdom and she clarifies the dynamics of their relationship further when the King threatens to punish her:

Why, it is in me then,
Not to love you, which will more afflict
Your bodie, then your punishment can mine (III.1.181-3).

This observation accentuates his emotional subservience to his 'mistress-favourite'.

Evadne asserts that she has the power she sought over the King and he does not, or cannot, deny it; moreover, she demonstrates her power in her dismissive comments which suggest that the King cannot act against her because his passion for her exceeds hers for him. The King is thus debased in his interaction with Evade because he is incapable of acting like a king with her – as

long as he loves her more than she him, she maintains her superiority in the emotional battleground that characterises their relationship. A king's inability or refusal to maintain his majesty with his favourites is recorded in Guicciardini's account and was evidently part of what so offended early modern courtly propriety. The pattern of behaviour exhibited in this exchange between Evadne and the King indicates that she has usurped the role of a ruler's favourite, for her hold on his affections is sufficient to undermine his authority over her and thus his majesty.

As I noted earlier, there is little evidence in the play of Evadne actively seeking to influence political affairs in *The Maid's Tragedy*, but admittedly there is little sense of the wider political world in this largely claustrophobic work. There is, however, a brief moment in Act Three scene one where Evadne reveals one instance in which she had an impact on the King's affairs, and that concerns her own marriage. Amintor despairingly asks the King why he selected him for the role of cuckold-husband to the 'King's mistress', and it is Evadne who provides the answer: 'I wold not have a foole, / It were no credit for me' (III.1.255-6). This may initially appear a matter of domestic rather than state concern, rendering Evadne's influence on political affairs negligible and correctly isolating her to the domestic sphere; however, it is worth recalling that a courtier's marriage was regularly a matter of policy, particularly when one of the participants includes the sister of both a prominent courtier and a respected soldier. In a patriarchal society, Evadne's marriage would be at the discretion of three men: her brothers, as her surviving male relations, one of whom would be head of their family's household, and the King, who is invested with patriarchal control over his entire domain and especially those who comprise his court.

Moreover, in insisting on this marriage Evadne ‘unmakes’ the match between Amintor and Aspatia, effecting the destruction of a prior contract that damages both Aspatia and her powerful father. Evidently, Evadne selected Amintor to be the wittol and compelled the King to accept her choice, thus influencing a matter of public policy to which the other interested parties had to accede. This again is characteristic of a royal favourite.

Philip Massinger’s play *The Roman Actor* similarly dramatizes the mistress’s acquisition of the role of favourite. The character of Domitia is arguably problematic for my study since her position as imperial mistress is represented as ambiguous, so I will begin by clarifying why I have included her in the pantheon of ‘rulers’ mistresses’. Domitia first appears in the play as the wife of the senator Lamia who is courted by proxy for the Emperor. Domitia is willing to become the Emperor’s new wife but Lamia is compelled to relinquish her. She thus seemingly becomes imperial wife rather than ‘mistress’ in its modern meaning, but the circumstances of the divorce and remarriage are dubious, which I will now demonstrate.

When the freedman Parthenius first approaches Domitia, she is certainly willing to accept Domitian’s suit, but expresses some reservations about how this new union will be achieved:

You know I have a husband. For my honour

I would not be his strumpet, and how law

Can be dispensed with to become his wife,

To me’s a riddle (*The Roman Actor*, I.2.40-3).

Parthenius responds: 'When power puts in its plea, the laws are silenced' (I.2.44). In his turn Lamia resists the imperial will until threatened by Parthenius, who warns him that he does 'know the danger else' (I.2.93). Parthenius's contention that the ruler is not subject to legalities would have particular resonance for a Caroline audience, aware as they were of Parliament's increasingly firm stance against what they perceived as monarchical overreach. The audience is encouraged to perceive Domitian as abusing his power when Parthenius threatens Lamia and claims that Domitian is above the law, therefore undermining the legality and legitimacy of his argument and consequently indicating that Domitia occupies the space of 'modern mistress' rather than lawful wife.

There is further evidence in the play for the continuing validity of Domitia's marriage to Lamia. The senator Sura observes the Emperor greeting the women in his family and whispers to Lamia '[y]our wife's forgotten' (I.4.61). Lamia responds that 'she will be remembered' (62). These lines show that the courtiers continue to perceive Domitia as the wife of Lamia, regardless of Domitian's orders to the contrary. More significantly, Domitian himself indicates that Domitia remained Lamia's wife when he orders the execution of Lamia so that he would no longer live 'to upbraid [Domitian] with [his] wrong' (II.1.240). He then bids Domitia come to him, declaring that '[p]lurality of husbands shall no more / Breed doubts or jealousies in you' (243-4). If the delusional Emperor cannot deny that Domitia remained the wife of another, then few others will believe it. Finally, Domitia herself later confirms that she came to Domitian as his 'sexual mistress', not his wife: 'Thy lust compelled me / To be a strumpet' (IV.2.135-6). She does not explicitly say 'mistress', but she doesn't have to;

‘strumpet’ denotes sexual immorality, a category of woman to which a wife does not naturally belong.

With such evidence I contend that Domitia’s position in the play is primarily that of ‘mistress’ in its modern meaning to Domitian. There is no suggestion from any of the main participants that the supposed dissolution of her marriage to Lamia was legal, and all members of this ménage frequently allude to Domitian’s relationship with Domitia as something outside of wedlock. This renders her position illegitimate, certainly not that of a true wife of Domitian. I will therefore analyse Domitia’s role in *The Roman Actor* as that of the ‘ruler’s mistress’. However, she is not the only ‘mistress’ present. Julia and Domitilla both declare themselves to be former ‘sexual mistresses’ of their imperial relative. Moreover, the character of Caenis identifies herself as the erstwhile sexual partner of the Emperor Vespasian. I will analyse these characters in greater detail, and I will show how Domitia usurps the prerogatives of a ruler’s favourite while also demonstrating that this role was either once occupied or sought by the former ‘rulers’ mistresses’.

The case for Domitia’s usurpation of the prerogatives of favourite or councillor is easy to make. When initially approached by Parthenius, the freedman indicates the power she may have to influence imperial policy by immediately soliciting her favour for his own career:

When every smile you give is a preferment,

And you dispose of provinces to your creatures,

Think on Parthenius (I.2.15-17).

Domitian later confirms the influence she has over him when he orders Parthenius to 'entreat' Domitia to play her music, 'for she rules him / Whom all men else obey' (II.1.171-2). This sexual and emotional submission on the behalf of Domitian to his 'sexual mistress' reveals the power she has over him, and this power debases the Emperor; like Guicciardini's King Charles, Emperor Domitian cannot maintain his majesty when with his favourite.

Domitilla compounds this impression when she speculates that Domitia may be able to indulge her illicit passion for the actor Paris because she is secure in her influence over Domitian: 'Presuming she can mould the emperor's will / Into what form she likes' (IV.1.10-11). The reference to informers suggests a political dimension to this potential scandal and firmly situates Domitia's supposed influence over the Emperor within the political sphere – again, another characteristic of the favourite usurped by the 'ruler's mistress'. Her potential political power is further emphasized following her liaison with Paris, when Stephanos warns Parthenius not to plot against her because '[h]er power o'er doting Caesar [is] now / Greater than ever (V.1.22-3). Parthenius is a key member of Domitian's entourage, a man who regularly interacts with the Emperor and the prominent political players in the Emperor's court. As such, anyone seeking to remove him from his post is interfering in political matters outside of the traditional female sphere of influence; consequently, Stephanos's caution that Domitia has the power to destroy Parthenius should she suspect him of plotting against her is indicative of her usurpation of the role of favourite, her seizing of political influence based on the ruler's affection for her.

Massinger's innovation in the portrayal of 'mistress-favourites' is apparent in his ahistorical inclusion of all the former 'rulers' mistresses' during

the Flavian rule. The disputes and disappointments expressed by these women accentuate the significance of Domitia's influence and the potential power that a 'mistress-favourite' may wield, as demonstrated in their first appearance where they jostle for primacy based upon their connection to the royal bloodline. Julia emphasizes her familial relation to Domitian, which Caenis challenges by referring to her pedigree as former 'mistress':

I was more:

The mistress of your father, and in his right

Claim duty from you (I.4.3-5).

The fact that Massinger uses the word 'mistress' in its modern meaning without qualification or clarification here demonstrates how the theatre has established its definition performatively by the time this play was written, and established it sufficiently so that the audience could recognise its usage. In her identity as former 'imperial mistress', Caenis is confident enough to challenge Julia, thus indicating just how much influence she possessed over the former Emperor Vespasian when she was his 'mistress'. She expects the royal household to serve or at least cede position to her, despite the fact that she has no formal position in the household. Consequently, the audience understands that Domitia, the current 'imperial mistress', could potentially wield considerable authority over the ruler and thus influence matters both political and domestic. Such power is characteristic of a ruler's favourite, and it is apparent that a 'ruler's mistress' could usurp this role in order to attain comparable powers.

This earlier scene is paralleled in Act Three scene one, where again two former 'mistresses' compete with each other. This time, however, it is over who

could lay claim to having suffered the most under the rule of Domitian. Domitilla dismisses Julia's assertion that her 'injuries' (III.1.2) are greater than Domitilla's with the following speech:

Besides, won by his perjuries that he would

Salute you with title of Augusta,

Your faint denial showed a full consent

And grant to his temptations (III.1.10-24).

Domitilla presents Julia's submission to Domitian as being predicated on his promise to make her his 'Augusta', a title conferred on several Empresses and former empresses in Ancient Rome. The implication is that she ultimately expected to become his wife, but the use of the word 'Augusta' is suggestive; it seems Massinger is highlighting the prestige and power that being 'Augusta' entails rather than the more prosaic existence that Julia could expect as a mere 'wife'. Domitilla therefore indicates that Julia wanted the political influence over Domitian that could be attained through conducting a sexual relationship with him, thus becoming his 'mistress' and usurping the prerogatives of a favourite – much like Domitia doing. Ultimately, what we have in Massinger's work are three 'rulers' mistresses' who desire the influence that a 'mistress-favourite' may attain, and one that possesses and wields it.

The political influence wielded by favourites in early modern courts troubled those within the privileged political circle, and many were not hesitant to attribute their influence to the favourite's erotic connection to the ruler.

Accusations of illicit sexual contact between rulers and favourites dogged the careers of such courtly luminaries as the Earl of Leicester, the Earl of Somerset,

and the Duke of Buckingham. Although their influence over their respective monarchs may have been due to little more than the ruler's personal affection or lust for them, nevertheless they had the right to operate within the political sphere because they were men. The 'ruler's mistress', however, was not afforded such access. Without an official position at court, her presence was limited to the illegitimate fringes of court society and she was fundamentally powerless unless she usurped the prerogatives of others, in this instance that of the ruler's favourite. I have demonstrated that the theatre was very aware of these debates and that several dramatists depict a 'ruler's mistress's' usurpation of the prerogatives of councillor or favourite in their plays. Evadne and Domitia both usurp the prerogatives of the favourite in their interactions with their lovers, allowing them to borrow some of his authority so as to achieve their desires, both personal and political. Their influence over the rulers is more threatening than that of the queen because their (potential) political manipulation involves operating outside of the traditional feminine sphere of influence; an effective favourite could attempt to rule the land through their relationship with its head. I will explore the logical extension of the 'mistress-favourite's' influence in the next section of the chapter, focusing on how a 'ruler's mistress' could extend her influence beyond usurping the prerogative of councillor or favourite and actually usurp the ruler's prerogatives as a man. Furthermore, if she can do this with the ruler, she can also do it with his subjects.

3. Usurping the Masculinity of a Ruler and his Subjects

I will now concentrate on the 'ruler's mistress's' usurpation of the prerogatives of the ruler himself – above all of his masculinity, an appropriation which fundamentally undermines his credibility and legitimacy as the head of the

body politic and thus renders this form of usurpation the most threatening to the social hierarchy. It is closely connected to the study of favourites, as the 'ruler's mistress' who usurps a favourite's prerogatives frequently extends her influence over the ruler to the extent that his position in the relationship is that of the submissive, the traditionally feminine position. As a result, the 'ruler's mistress' usurps the masculinity that the ruler has relinquished in his infatuation with the 'mistress-favourite'. This intersects with discourses of tyranny in the early modern period, for a tyrant was frequently depicted as a leader who is subject to his passions in a way that is undeniably feminine. In this section of the chapter I will explore the early modern understanding of tyranny and its relation to femininity, before analysing *The Maid's Tragedy* and *The Roman Actor* for their portrayals of feminised tyrants whose 'sexual mistresses' have usurped their masculinity and thus usurped their social identity as men. Furthermore, I will demonstrate that these 'rulers' mistresses' were also capable of usurping the masculine prerogatives of the male subjects of a tyrant, particularly when they lacked the ability to fulfil the male social role of avenger; the 'ruler's mistress', I will show, was more than capable of assuming this particular masculine role.

a) Kings and Tyrants: Classical definitions

In a period of increased centralisation of government and humanist education, classical political theory was of great interest to scholars and political theorists. As such, I will begin by examining classical definitions of tyranny and how their differences were interpreted and utilised in the Renaissance era. In Ancient Greek the words *tyrannos* (tyrant) and *basileus* (king) were interchangeable, and it was not until Xenophon that a distinction was made

between the two:²⁰² ‘For government of men with their consent and in accordance with the laws of the state was kingship; while government of unwilling subjects and not controlled by laws, but imposed by the will of the ruler, was despotism’ (*Memorabilia*, 4.6.12).²⁰³ Such simplicity was eroded with the advent of later classical scholars, notably Plato and Aristotle, who clarified the notion that a tyrant was irrational and lacked the self-control that was necessary to be a good king. Plato declares that ‘the best, the most just, and the most happy is the most kingly, who rules like a king over himself, and that the worst, the most unjust, and the most wretched is the most tyrannical, who most tyrannizes himself and the city he rules’.²⁰⁴ Aristotle’s complex analysis of various forms of kingship and tyranny includes a similar dichotomy to Plato, observing that ‘[t]he aim of the tyrant is his own pleasure: the aim of a king is the Good’.²⁰⁵ Essentially, a tyrant was subject to his passions while an effective king was rational and disciplined.

The connection between tyranny and the passions is especially important to my study, for it is the tyrant’s susceptibility to these uncontrollable emotions and desires that connects tyranny to femininity. The early modern understanding of ‘passions’ received its first substantive treatment with Gail Kern Paster, who

²⁰² Rebecca W. Bushnell, *Tragedies of Tyrants: Political Thought and Theater in the English Renaissance* (London: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 10.

²⁰³ Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, ed. by E. C. Marchant <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/> [accessed 9 January 2016].

²⁰⁴ Plato, *Republic*, trans. by G. M. A. Grube, rev. by C. D. C. Reeve (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992), p. 250.

²⁰⁵ Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. by Ernest Barker, rev. by R. F. Stalley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 211.

focuses specifically on how ‘humoral theory was instrumental in the production and maintenance of gender and class difference’ and how women’s inability to control their bodies led to embarrassment.²⁰⁶ Thanks to humoral theory, the body was thought of as having agency of its own, its boundaries were permeable, and a person’s well-being required a delicate balance of the humours to be maintained in the body. Humoral theory contributed to the hierarchical assumptions of women’s lack of control and inferiority to man, and this chapter will tie together strands of humoral and political theory through the examination of the ‘sexual mistress’; specifically, through the exploration of the illegitimate woman’s usurpation of power and gender identity in the wake of emasculating male emotion. Studies in humoral theory help clarify concerns about men’s lack of control when they possess or pursue a ‘mistress’ in the modern sense, particularly as a ruler. The potentially fatal power of emotions makes the necessity for self-control so paramount and the struggle that reason must endure to harness emotions so important, especially considering the porous nature of the human body in early modern thought that made it susceptible to outside stimulus such as theatrical performances. Kern Paster notes that women were thought of as constitutionally less-capable of self-control and rationality than men, while the appropriateness of specific emotions depended on one’s role in the gender and social hierarchy.

Meanwhile, Lesel Dawson cites the intersection of literary representations of lovesickness with early modern notions of the body and sickness therein,

²⁰⁶ Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Discipline of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 7. See also Kern Paster’s *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

focusing on ‘how the literary representation of lovesickness relates to wider issues of gender and identity’.²⁰⁷ My work overlaps with that of Dawson, specifically her analysis of the seemingly subverted power relations inherent in Neoplatonism and how love can be both an elevating and debasing force. Dawson examines prevailing perceptions of lovesickness, namely that lovesickness in women was embodied in a way lovesickness in men was not, and therefore male lovesickness could be an elevating emotion, in line with Petrarchan and Neoplatonic thought; a woman’s lack of reason meanwhile prevents her from transforming a bodily ‘disturbance’ (Dawson, p. 4) into something else and she is ultimately subjugated ‘to her body’s sexual demands’ (Dawson, p. 4). Dawson disputes this, contending that men may be disempowered or emasculated by their lovesickness and need not necessarily resent it. Such masochism is shared by lovesick men and women, and it highlights the fact that lovesickness is not about the beloved but about the lover – much as I argued in my first chapter. One of her central arguments is that for the elite woman, lovesickness could be a powerful means of self-expression; on the other hand, it could be weaponized as a psychological tool against a reluctant beloved, a tool utilised by men to regain control through seduction. Of particular interest to me were her comments regarding how contemporaries were discomfited by Neoplatonism: some perceived it as a tool of seduction, others as a medium through which the gender hierarchy is dangerously subverted, and some felt that the emphasis on spiritually-elevating chastity contradicts early modern medicine that fears lovesickness. Her argument that ‘[f]or men in particular, lovesickness is portrayed as a violent passion that can engender an emasculating

²⁰⁷ Lesel Dawson, *Lovesickness and Gender in Early Modern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 2.

loss of self-control and self-possession' (Dawson, p. 164) is one that I will develop in this chapter, specifically in reference to a ruler emasculated by his attachment to a 'sexual mistress'. However, what these studies omit from their analysis is the facility with which certain women may usurp the masculinity of rulers castrated by their emotions, an omission that I will remedy.

I will continue this analysis by demonstrating the connection between a lack of emotional discipline in men and tyranny, primarily through an examination of early modern discourses regarding what exactly constitutes a tyrant. However, one should first consider ancient understandings of tyranny as embodied in the irrational, feminised ruler. Michel Foucault clarifies the importance of emotional self-control for a man by stating that 'a man who was not sufficiently in control of his pleasures – whatever his choice of object – was regarded as 'feminine''.²⁰⁸ Such a connection between tyranny and femininity – or, more accurately, effeminacy – features heavily in Greek literature, which explores how the tyrant's uncontrollable appetite aligns him with the similarly irrational and intemperate women rather than the disciplined, rational men.²⁰⁹ Such notions are encapsulated by Froma I. Zeitlin in her writings on Greek texts:

After all, madness, the irrational, and the emotional aspects of life are associated in the culture more with women than with men. The boundaries of women's

²⁰⁸ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure*, trans. by Robert Hurley, 3 vols (New York: Vintage, 1985), II p. 85.

²⁰⁹ Bushnell, p. 20.

bodies are perceived as more fluid, more permeable, more open to affect and entry from the outside, less easily controlled by intellectual and rational means.²¹⁰

Such connections between tyranny and femininity were developed in Aristotle's *Politics*:

The methods applied in extreme democracies are thus all to be found in tyrannies. They both encourage feminine influence in the family, in the hope that wives will tell tales of their husbands [...] women are not likely to plot against tyrants: indeed, as they prosper under them, they are bound to look with favour on tyrannies (Aristotle, pp. 219-20).

Not only were tyrants feminine in their lack of self-control, their whole system of government was favourable to women and encouraged their dominance. Such authority invested in women was anathema to Aristotle, who considered women fundamentally unfit to rule because '[t]he male is naturally fitter to command than the female' (Aristotle, p. 33). As Leah Bradshaw notes,

Aristotle says that the male is more fit to rule than the female because [...] the female lacks the authority to carry out her own deliberations [...] The incontinence of women seemed to Aristotle to consist in the female's inferior endurance of either pain or passion.²¹¹

Again, one is confronted with the idea that women lack the self-control necessary to be a ruler, and a ruler who succumbs to his passions becomes a tyrant. This

²¹⁰ Froma I. Zeitlin, 'Playing the Other: Theater, Theatricality, and the Feminine in Greek Drama', *Representations*, 11 (1985), pp. 63-94 (p. 65). I am indebted to Bushnell in this part of my analysis.

²¹¹ Leah Bradshaw, 'Political Rule, Prudence and the "Woman Question" in Aristotle', *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 24 (1991), pp. 557-573 (p. 570).

became particularly influential to early modern understandings of tyranny, to which I will now direct my attention.

b) Early Modern Understanding of Tyranny

The early modern understanding of tyranny was complicated by the different forms of monarchy that governed Renaissance Europe. Firstly, classical literature advocated resistance to tyranny, and the exemplar found in the narrative of Lucretia's rape seemed to praise those who ruthlessly expelled tyrants from their kingdoms. Such attitudes were arguably inevitable in the democratic Greek nations and Republican Rome. However, early modern Europe had few Republics and was heavily influenced by the theory of the divine right of kings, the 'belief in the king's appointment by God as His representative on earth' (Henshall, p. 151). Henshall clearly articulates the popular early modern understanding that the King was selected for his position by God and it is an act of blasphemy to rebel against God's anointed monarch. The virtue of tyrannicide became the evil of regicide. Despite this seeming contradiction, the early modern understanding of tyranny did not differ markedly from the classical. For instance, Erasmus followed the traditional route of connecting tyranny with femininity: 'It is the mark of a tyrant, and indeed of a woman, to follow an emotional impulse, and fear is a very bad protector for any length of time' (Erasmus, p. 53). William Tyndale seemingly differentiates between different forms of tyranny, preferring an autocratic 'tyrant' to an effeminate 'king':

For a tyrant though he do wrong unto the good, yet he punisheth the evil and maketh all men obey neither suffereth any man to poll but himself only. A king that is soft as silk and effeminate, that is to say turned unto the nature of a woman with child, so that he cannot resist them, and what with the wily tyranny

of them that ever rule him, shall be much more grievous unto the realm than a right tyrant.²¹²

Although he uses the word ‘king’, Tyndale’s description of an effeminate ruler is too closely allied to classical conceptions of a feminine tyrant to be ignored.

Machiavelli advises the practical ruler to maintain the appearance of virtue but not refrain from acts of cruelty should they prove necessary: ‘Therefore, a prince must not worry about the infamy of being considered cruel when it is a matter of keeping his subjects united and loyal’ (Machiavelli, p. 57). The influence of classical definitions of tyranny may be seen most clearly in the following passage:

what makes [a ruler] hated above all else is being rapacious and a usurper of the property and the women of his subjects. He must refrain from this. [...] What makes him despised is being considered changeable, frivolous, effeminate, cowardly, and irresolute (Machiavelli, pp. 62-3).

Plato states that ‘[t]his is tyranny, which through stealth or force appropriates the property of others’ (Plato, p. 20). Machiavelli adopts this tenet, as well as the prevailing classical and early modern notions that loathesome tyrants are often characterised by feminine qualities such as being ‘changeable’ and ‘effeminate’. Classical and early modern writers thus agree that a tyrannical ruler frequently relinquishes his masculinity.

The nature of tyranny is also discussed in the treatises that comprised the Monarchomach discourse, a series of writings produced by Huguenots as they

²¹² William Tyndale, *The Obedience of Christian Man*, ed. by David Daniell (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 42.

resisted the orthodox Catholicism imposed on them by the French royal family. The essential characterisation of a tyrant as explored in *Francogallia* (1573) and *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* (1579) is a ruler who rules without the consent of or for the benefit of the people: ‘these treatises show instead that *dominium* must always reside in the body of an assembled people, and it is only by an act of delegation that a king exercises authority’.²¹³ The author of the later text declares ‘that all Kings receive their Royall authority from the people, that the whole people considered in one body is above and greater than the King’, placing their rights above that of a tyrannical ruler.²¹⁴ D. J. B. Trim observes that despite differing interpretations of what exactly constituted a tyrant in early modern thought, ‘many [...] define tyranny in terms of governing for a narrow or selfish interest, enriching the few, rather than for the *bien publique*, the *res publica*, or the ‘common weal’.²¹⁵ These works establish that resistance was not anathema to early modern subjects, and it may be necessary should a ruler fail in his ‘guardian’ duties. According to this formulation, a ruler who fails in his stewardship of a nation’s people in favour of aggrandising himself is a tyrant, and a tyrant may be resisted.

²¹³Daniel Lee, *Popular Sovereignty in Early Modern Constitutional Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 22.

²¹⁴ Hubert Languet, *Vindiciae contra tyrannos: a defence of liberty against tyrants* (London: 1648), pp. 118-9/ Q2^v - Q2^r.

²¹⁵ D. J. B. Trim, ‘“Charitie commaundeth us to helpe the oppressed”: the monarchomach treatises and intervention against tyranny’, *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 29 (2012), pp. 655-668 www.academia.edu [accessed 2/2/2018], (p. 662).

Monarchomach discourse thus resurrects the ancient tyrannicides of classical lore, a significant challenge to the notion of a ruler's divine right to rule. These contradictory ideological viewpoints find ample expression onstage, notably in plays which feature extra-marital sexual partners of rulers performing this very role. In this section I analyse how rulers are portrayed as tyrants; I will establish that it is primarily the rulers' lack of masculine self-control – specifically in regard to their extra-marital sexual partners – which encourages an audience to perceive them as tyrants. I will then explore how this abnegation of 'maleness' is represented on stage and the impact it has on depictions of 'rulers' mistresses', including their usurpation of the ruler's masculinity and that of the traditionally male tyrannicide. To do so, I return to the *The Maid's Tragedy* and *The Roman Actor*. I will elucidate how the rulers in these plays reveal themselves to be tyrants, and I will then explore how their 'sexual mistresses' usurp their social status as men – that is, steal their masculinity. I will then extend this analysis to consider the other masculine role that is usurped by the 'ruler's mistress' in these 'tyrant plays': that of the avenger. The male revenge hero is signally lacking in these two works, and therefore it is largely left to the 'ruler's mistress' to usurp the masculine prerogative to avenge the dishonour done to one's family by the tyrant.

(i) Evadne's Usurpation of Masculinity in *The Maid's Tragedy*

Compared to the Emperor Domitian, the King in *The Maid's Tragedy* seems a fairly benevolent ruler. When his will is resisted by two courtiers, the King responds leniently: 'This is no time / To force you too't, I doe love you both' (*The Maid's Tragedy*, I.2.102-3). This encourages a favourable impression of the King from the audience. It is not until Evadne reveals to Amintor that their

marriage is a sham that both the audience and Amintor himself becomes aware of the King's perfidy. Amintor clarifies for the audience that the ruler is 'a tyrant' (III.1.223) - and he is right. As Aristotle states, tyranny 'has no regard to any public interest which does not also serve the tyrant's own advantage. The aim of a tyrant is his own pleasure' (Aristotle, p. 211). The King has disregarded the well-being of his subjects, specifically Amintor, and in his implicit demand that the marriage remain unconsummated he has ignored the legal rights that Amintor has regarding conjugal relations with his wife and the right to a legitimate heir. He further desires Amintor's aid to allow the royal affair to continue undetected, thus requesting that a noble subject become a pander for his own wife:

Thou maist live *Amintor*,

Free as thy King, if thou wilt winke at this,

And be a meanes that we may meet in secret (III.1.268-70).

The secrecy of the King and Evadne's relationship merely exacerbates the illicit and illegitimate nature of their affair, with Evadne's position as his 'sexual mistress' not only not socially sanctioned but also not socially known. Such a king may not be depicted as a deluded, autocratic monster, but by exploiting the legal and religious institution of marriage in order to achieve his illicit desires the King is clearly a tyrant. As Bushnell says, 'the King's private life acts as both metaphor for and microcosm of his government, when he enacts law and edicts in attempting to satisfy his lust' (Bushnell, pp. 162-3). Melantius defends his conspiracy to kill the King by claiming that '[w]hilst he was good, [he] cald him King, and serv'd him (V.2.40). This changed once the King's 'hot pride drew him to disgrace [Melantius]' (44). Such a claim may not have passed muster with

some early modern dynasts, but it does allude back to the moral binary that Plato suggests differentiated a king from a tyrant.

I have established that the King in *The Maid's Tragedy* will be understood by the audience to be unequivocally a tyrant; now I will demonstrate that the audience will also have understood that Evadne, by her actions, usurps his masculine prerogatives. Finkelpearl observes that 'she derives [...] self-assurance from the power behind her' (Finkelpearl, p. 191), but this does not adequately address Evadne's usurpation of the King's role which stems from the King's infatuation with her. Evadne's sexual loyalty to her monarch was conditional on him remaining King, and no punishment that the King could imagine for her could compare to his pain if she withdrew her attentions. This indicates that the monarch is infatuated with Evadne, and certainly his abuse of his loyal subjects' rights in order to continue this affair secretly suggests that he has little to no self-control. A man was expected to be rational and disciplined while women gave free reign to their passions: 'It is the mark of a tyrant, and indeed of a woman, to follow an emotional impulse' (Erasmus, p. 53). Bushnell develops this argument, observing that

[t]he use of femininity – and effeminacy – as a representation of tyranny thus works on several levels of Renaissance analogical political thinking. [...] The image of "the woman on top" is not just a figure of a rebellion in the lower orders of society: it symbolizes a problem at the heart of sovereignty, located in reason's imperfect mastery of desire (Bushnell, p. 69).

A man's inability to control his emotions thus leads to the potential usurpation of masculine authority by women.

Further discussion about the significance of self-control for the male ruler may be found in work addressing early modern emotions, including Gail Kern Paster's observation that '[a]n excess of emotion [...] was understood to be potentially fatal' (*Humoring the Body*, p. 11). Such fatality may refer to the literal effect that emotion may have upon the body experiencing it, but I argue that in the body of the ruler this loss of control can have greater symbolic resonance as the ruler's body may often be perceived as personifying the body politic; when the ruler's body is fatally riven by emotion, so is the body politic. I agree with Dawson's argument that '[f]or men in particular, lovesickness is portrayed as a violent passion that can engender an emasculating loss of self-control and self-possession' (Dawson, p. 164), although I would note that in the case of the King in *The Maid's Tragedy*, this emasculating loss of self-control is represented literally in the King's death scene when the male monarch is rendered physically powerless by the woman he loves, embodying the imagery of 'the woman on top' in such a manner that the scene is worth further examination.

The bedroom scene of Act Five is the apotheosis of Evadne's usurpation of the King's masculinity. The scene opens with her dismissing the King's guard, showing that she has already usurped his authority: 'Give me the key then, and let none be neere. / Tis the King's pleasure' (V.1.2-3). The playwrights clearly hint at this usurpation by having Evadne claim it is 'the King's pleasure'; the audience is aware that it is actually hers. She proceeds to bind the slumbering monarch to his bed and stab him with the knife. The knife has particular significance here, being a bladed weapon that Evadne is unafraid to wield while both Melantius and Aminto prove singularly unable to wield their own bladed weapons when confronted with their monarch. Will Fisher observes that 'the sex /gender

The staging of this scene evokes rape, with the ‘masculine’ Evadne straddling a prone, vulnerable man and then penetrating him repeatedly in a bloody frenzy using a phallic-shaped weapon. Her comments to her lover as she assaults him suggest that she no longer identifies herself as a woman:

That knowes not pittie (V.1.63-7).

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and gentle' (73), qualities held as traditional virtues for women; instead she consummates this relationship with her knife. Evadne unequivocally positions herself as a man in this scene, even a royal rapist, when she destroys her lover, the one whose infatuation with her has rendered him feminine. When the dismissed gentlemen of the bedchamber and other courtiers eventually stumble upon the scene after Evadne departs, their horror is matched only by their disbelief that a woman could commit such an act:

1. GENTLEMAN: Who can believe a woman could doe this?

[...]

CLEON: Her act! a woman! (V.1.126-9).

This incredulity that a woman could commit regicide leads me to another area of importance in the play and another instance where Evadne usurps the masculine prerogative – specifically the prerogative of avenger.

From Hieronimo in *The Spanish Tragedy* to Hamlet, the revenge hero on the early modern stage was male. However, *The Maid's Tragedy* is singular in its depiction of various male characters who find themselves incapable or reluctant to avenge their wrongs. The reason for this, as Eileen Allman observes, is because the tyrant has essentially feminised his subjects:

In such deeply ingrained gestures of dominance and submission, the bedrock of analogy between the political and the sexual has great residual power. The male subject, in a smoothly functioning political hierarchy, must at some time forego the display of male gender and play the woman's part. Yet the rationale that underwrites the hierarchy, the rituals that perpetuate it, and, above all, the exclusion of women from it, all maintain and valorize the maleness of subjected

men. When, however, the relationship between men in superior and inferior positions in the hierarchy is no longer based on such a mutually honored set of signs, the affirming bond between them becomes rivalry, the gestures of fealty female and feminizing.²¹⁷

Because they must inevitably occupy the submissive position in relation to the ruler, male subjects are worryingly close to assuming the role of women – after all, in any male-female dynamic the woman is expected to assume the submissive or subservient role. The social inferiority of a male subject compared to a ruler means that this submission is inevitable and can be borne as long as their ‘maleness’ continues to be respected in all other areas. Unfortunately, when a tyrant emerges to seduce various women in the kingdom, he violates the patriarchal right of that woman’s family members to bestow her on any man they see fit. By abusing the male prerogatives that his subjects hold so dear, the tyrant positions himself as the sole masculine authority in his kingdom, thus feminising the men. This happens in *The Maid’s Tragedy*, and it is made particularly explicit when Amintor attempts to draw his sword on the King but capitulates when the King reminds him of his authority by proffering his own sword. Acting as phallic signifiers, the swords ultimately do not clash because only the King has the right to wield it over other men. The men of Rhodes are incapable of acting against their monarch, so one of them eventually enlists a woman to commit the deed. This woman is Evadne, and when she avenges the dishonour done to herself, her family, and her husband, she usurps the male social role of avenger; she

²¹⁷ Eileen Allman, *Jacobean Revenge Tragedy and the Politics of Virtue* (London: Associated University Presses, 1999), p. 41.

essentially usurps the masculinity that is singularly lacking in the other male characters in the play.

The first evidence of male incapacity surfaces when an enraged Amintor demands to know Evadne's lover's identity:

AMINTOR: No, let me know the man that wrongs me so,
That I may cut his body into motes,
[...]

EVADNE Why tis the King.
[...]

AMINTOR: Oh thou hast nam'd a word that wipes away
All thoughts revengefull (II.1.297-307).

Amintor is rendered paralysed by his realisation that to strike at his wrong-doer would be to assault the man divinely-appointed to rule the country:

in that sacred name,
The King, there lies a terror, what fraile man
Dares lift his hand against it? (II.1.307-9).

Interestingly enough, Evadne makes a similar point when the King initially rejects her protestations of chastity:

I am no man
To answer with a blow, or if I were,
You are the King (III.1.190-2).

At this point in the play Evadne does not identify herself with common men – that is, she has not usurped their prerogatives. Moreover, she recognises the difficulty that men have in raising an arm to the King. Nevertheless, by the final act she will have usurped the masculine prerogatives of the male subjects who desire revenge (in particular her brother) and have enacted that vengeance.

In this same scene, Amintor again proves that he cannot avenge himself on his monarch, even when braved face to face. When Amintor reaches for his sword, the King stays his hand by reminding him that he is a subject while simultaneously reaching for his own phallic weapon:

Draw not thy sword, thou knowst I cannot feare

A subjects hand, but thou shalt feele the weight

Of this if thou doest rage (III.1.233-5).

Amintor's sword wilts as he acknowledges that the King has a '[d]ivinitie about [him] that strikes dead / [Amintor's] rising passions' (III.1.240-1). The imagery evoked in this scene with the two male opponents reaching for their phallic weapons over a question of sexual territory is evoked again when Evadne has the King strapped to the bed and bears a dagger; unlike Amintor's blade, hers does not wilt when confronted with the King.

The scene where Melantius confronts Evadne in a locked room is troubling in its sexual dynamics but it is the moment when Evadne finally usurps the male prerogative to act as avenger. Initially, when charged with her sexual immorality, Evadne seeks refuge in her prerogatives as 'mistress-favourite': 'Unhand me and learne manners, such another / Forgetfulnesse forfeits your life (IV.1.47-50). She orders and threatens her brother with the authority she has

usurped as a 'mistress-favourite', but he is unimpressed, informing her that her 'great maintainers are not here' (IV.1.78). Melantius then focuses the conversation on male/female dynamics, remarking: '[f]orsake me then all weaknesses of nature, / That make men women' (IV.1.95-6). He grows more physical, eventually threatening her at sword-point in a moment that is very suggestive of impending rape:

speake you whore, speake truth,

Or by the deare soule of thy sleeping father,

This sword will be thy lover (IV.1.96-8).

At this moment, Melantius enforces his will on Evadne by exploiting his masculinity, threatening her with internal penetration with his phallic sword while simultaneously expelling every ounce of femininity from his psyche. Faced with the deadly rape in her temporary prison, Evadne makes a choice. Her efforts to assert her will over her brother as the 'mistress-favourite' has failed, so she chooses another role that will allow her to act and interact within the courtly environment: that of the male avenger.

Despite his forceful masculinity in this scene, Melantius is unable to become the avenger, the masculine role that he would be expected to assume. This complete passivity undermines Shullenberger's claim that Melantius 'uses Evadne as the instrument in his plot against the king' (Shullenberger, p. 141). Melantius never admits to the same form of impotence that Amintor does when confronted with the divinely-appointed King, but he sends his sister to avenge his, her, and Amintor's wrongs upon the body of the King, while he immures himself within the walls of a fortress that belongs to another man. The final scenes of the

play have the male characters paralysed or oblivious while Evadne usurps the male prerogative to ride the kingdom of the tyrant. Peter Berek makes the telling observation that ‘Evadne goes through the kind of crisis of conscience usually associated with men – Hamlet, for example’.²¹⁸ The implication of this remark is that Evadne occupies the role of revenge hero, the traditionally-masculine part that her brothers and husband shun in favour of hiding until after the King’s dispatch. The character of Aspatia, meanwhile, disguises herself as her own brother in order to achieve her desired end at the hands of Amintor, thus literally donning the mantle of masculinity that Evadne wears metaphorically.

Evadne usurps the prerogatives of men including those that transform her into a revenge hero. I disagree with Allman’s contention that Evadne becomes the puppet or tool of Melantius in his revenge scheme as she is not acting exclusively for him; she is acting for herself and women in addition to her family. This is apparent once she determines to destroy the King: ‘And all you spirits of abused Ladies, / Helpe me in this performance (IV.1.167-9). Later, when she finishes stabbing her former lover, she lists those whom she avenges:

this for my Lord *Amintor*,

This for my noble brother, and this stroke

For the most wrongd of women. (V.1.109-11).

She usurps the prerogatives of the impotent men at the court to seek vengeance on the tyrannical king. However, she does not do that solely for Melantius or

²¹⁸ Peter Berek, ‘Cross-Dressing, Gender, & Absolutism in the Beaumont & Fletcher Plays’, *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 44 (2004), pp. 359-377 <DOI: 10.1353/sel.2004.0013> (p. 370).

Amintor; she does it for herself and the other women who have suffered from male abuse.

(ii) The Female Characters' Usurpation of Masculinity in *The Roman Actor*

The Roman Actor is a tyrant tragedy, depicting the multitude of ways in which the Emperor Domitian infringes on the sexual and legal rights of his subjects. I have discussed above the dubious legality of his order that Lamia and Domitia dissolve their marriage, but the first indication that Domitian is a tyrant comes from Rusticus:

they are only safe

That know to soothe the prince's appetite

And serve his lusts (*The Roman Actor*, I.1.79-81).

Massinger thus evokes the immorality that Plato claimed characterised so many a tyrant, and this impression is compounded in the scene where Lamia is forced to relinquish his wife to the Emperor:

Cannot a man be master of his wife

[...]

I in mine own house am emperor,

And will defend what's mine (I.2.65-8).

This corresponds with Allman's argument that a tyrant feminises his male subjects when he disregards their masculine rights; in this case, he robs Lamia of his rights as head of his household and 'master of his wife'. Domitian later

confirms the audience's suspicions by himself acknowledging that he holds his will superior to all other laws, divine and earthly:

What our desires grant leave and privilege to,
Though contradicting all divine decrees,
Or laws confirmed by Romulus and Numa,
Shall be held sacred (II.1.146-9).

With the Emperor unambiguously identified as a tyrant, the question becomes who will avenge their wrongs and thus rid Rome of this monster? The answer, as with *The Maid's Tragedy*, will be found in women.

I have demonstrated through Lamia that Domitian has feminised his male subjects, transforming them into the largely passive recipients of his wrongs. There is seemingly no one willing or capable to act the avenger or tyrannicide:

they do conclude there was
A Lucrece once, a Collatine and a Brutus,
But nothing Roman left now but in you (II.1.132-4).

In Aretinus's comparison, there are no corresponding figures at Domitian's court to those of Lucrece, Collatine, and Brutus, despite the fact that the current tyrant has abused women in the manner of Lucrece –as evidenced in Domitilla's claim that Domitian raped her –and that Lamia clearly suffers in a similar manner to Collatine. Since Lucretia inspired the male community to avenge her rape and both Collatine and Brutus acted on her request, what Aretinus is really communicating is that there are no inspiring women or male avengers left in Rome. Lucretia resisted Tarquin's sexual advances, unlike most of the women at

Domitian's court who seized the opportunity to become the 'ruler's mistress', and few of the senators mount any significant resistance to Domitian beyond whispered complaints. The result of this male paralysis and lack of traditional feminine virtue meant that it was left to the female characters to usurp the masculine prerogative and become revenge heroes. It is primarily Domitia who occupies the role of avenger, but the other female characters are influential in plotting the Emperor's death.

Before I continue, I must acknowledge that it is ultimately men who wield the daggers that end Domitian's life. The primary assassin, however, performs this role solely for the benefit of his patroness, Domitilla: 'Say but you "Go on" / And I will reach his heart (III.1.51-2). He confirms this willingness to act as her avenger by proxy as the scene concludes: 'I am still prepared / To execute when you please to command me (III.1.74-5). Unlike Evadne in *The Maid's Tragedy*, Stephanos is truly a tool of another's vengeance; his animosity is predicated on his loyalty to Domitilla, not on any personal wrong done to himself. This scene plants the seed of conspiracy against Domitian, and it is planted among and nurtured by the wronged 'mistresses'. Domitilla in particular presents herself as an avenger: 'I that have suffered greater wrongs bear thus; / And that, till my revenge, my comfort it' (III.2.300-1). It is therefore her revenge along with the other 'rulers' mistresses' which is enacted on Domitian's body, making them a form of avenger. In the end, however, they have to cede primacy to Domitia as avenger, for it is this character who – as the current 'ruler's mistress' – truly usurps the prerogatives of the male revenge hero.

Notably, it is Massinger's play which most clearly delineates a faction; the alliance between Parthenius, Stephanos, and the four 'sexual mistresses' is one

predicated on the shared political objective to assassinate the Emperor. Moreover, Domitilla and Domitia's patronage of Stephanos and Paris respectively comprises another form of factional alliance that may '[consist] of three broad but distinct groups – "friends," "followers," and "servants"' (Shephard, p. 725), propelling the female characters to the forefront of this faction with Domitia eventually emerging as its de facto leader. Elizabeth A. Brown's work examines the political benefits of female alliances, noting how the complete devotion of (Shakespeare's) Cleopatra's attendants deprived them of the kinship networks that Queen Elizabeth's ladies possessed, and Cleopatra thus lacked the wider support that would have benefitted her politically.²¹⁹ This is not true of the 'sexual mistresses' of *The Roman Actor*, three of whom have already found common cause by the beginning of the play and with all four 'mistresses' and Parthenius benefitting from a connection of Domitilla's: Stephanos, her retainer and their eventual tool of vengeance. An alliance emerges in Massinger's play between the discarded 'rulers' mistresses' and subsequently Domitia despite their mutual antipathy, and it is one that forms through the shared activity of female complaint in defiance of the male patriarch who enforces political silence upon them. The result is a factional alliance comprising primarily of these women that forms through lamentation and the shared objective of avenging their wrongs.

As I noted earlier, it is sometimes difficult to separate discourses of favouritism from those of tyranny, especially in regard to a 'ruler's mistress's' usurpation of prerogatives; a 'ruler's mistress' who usurps the prerogatives of a

²¹⁹ Elizabeth A. Brown, ' "Companion Me with My Mistress": Cleopatra, Elizabeth I, and Their Waiting Women', in *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women's Alliances in Early Modern England*, ed. by Frye and Robertson, pp. 131-145 (p. 131).

favourite often extends that influence over the ruler to such an extent that she usurps his masculinity. This certainly happens with Domitia whose influence over Domitian is undeniable; John E. Curran even states that Domitian's attachment to Domitia is the only thing that humanizes him and presents the audience with more than just the archetypical 'tyrant' character of Roman historical and dramatic literature.²²⁰ This of course ignores the fact that Domitian's passion for Domitia helps characterise him as a tyrant, evincing as it does the effeminacy or lack of reason that tyrannical rulers were wont to exhibit in early modern conceptions of tyranny. Domitian hints at this devotion to his 'sexual mistress' when he orders Parthenius to 'entreat' Domitia, 'for she rules him / Whom all men else obey' (III.171-2). Such passion for another is not a masculine quality, for men were meant to be rational and disciplined human beings who rightly governed the irrational and passionate sex. Domitian's infatuation with his illegitimate sexual partner aligns him with the feminine, and Domitia is swift to usurp his masculinity. This is most evident in her dealings with Paris, the actor with whom she swiftly falls in lust. When she finally gets him alone, Domitia acts '[a]gainst the decent modesty of [her] sex' (IV.2.55) by declaring her desire for him, becoming aggressive when Paris demurs:

Let mean ladies

Use prayer and entreaties to their creatures

To rise up instruments to serve their pleasures;

But for Augusta so to lost herself,

²²⁰ John E. Curran Jr., 'Fletcher, Massinger, and Roman Imperial Character', *Comparative Drama*, 43 (2009), pp. 317-354 (p. 341).

That holds command o'er Caesar and the world,

Were poverty of spirit. Thou must! Thou shalt!

(IV.2.74-9).

One can imagine that Domitian once made comments like these when seducing (or coercing) women into bed. Massinger presents this interaction between Domitian and the lowborn Paris as a form of rape scene, with Domitia in the role of rapist. She usurps the masculine prerogative to seduce or coerce a modest or unwilling sexual partner into submission, and she specifically usurps Domitian's male social role by compounding her sexual aggressiveness with the borrowed authority of Domitian's superior position in Roman society. Paris indicates that he cannot resist the force of Domitia's masculine will despite the dangers that accompany it: 'Alas, I know that the denial's death, / Nor can my grant, discovered, threaten more' (IV.2.89-90). Domitia thus triumphs with her usurped masculine authority over one of Domitian's feminised male subjects.

The Emperor's response to Domitia's provocation again reveals the extent to which he has become feminised by his irrational passion for his 'sexual mistress':

What power

Her beauty still holds o'er my soul that wrongs

Of this unpardonable nature cannot teach me

To right myself and hate her! – Kill her! – Hold!

Oh, that my dotage should increase from that

Which should breed detestation! (IV.2.141-146).

This dithering accentuates Domitian's irrationality, and in the following scene Stephanos describes in withering terms the tyrant's paralysing devotion to his lover. Parthenius asks if Domitia is '[r]eceived again to grace' (V.1.13), to which Stephanos responds:

Nay, courted to it,

Such is the impotence of his affection.

$$[\dots]$$

Her power o'er doting Caesar being now

Greater than ever (V.1.13-23).

Domitia confirms this impression of the Emperor by declaring, to his face, that he ‘[i]s a weak, feeble man, a bondman to / His violent passions, and in that [her] slave’ (V.1.48-9). The feminisation of Domitian is complete, and it just remains to be seen what Domitia will do with the masculinity she has usurped from her lover now that Paris is no longer around for her to assault. She chooses to join the conspiracy, and although neither she nor the other ‘rulers’ mistresses’ personally stab the man who has wronged them, they do establish themselves as avengers by declaring the wrongs for which Domitian dies:

DOMITIA: This for my Paris!

JULIA: This for thy incest!

DOMITILLA: This for thy abuse

Of Domitilla (V.2.73-5).

These women are the true revenge heroes of *The Roman Actor*, and they achieved this by usurping the masculine prerogative that Domitian relinquished in his

passion for Domitia and that other male characters relinquished when confronted with the Emperor's power.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter I have established that the woman who occupied the social and cultural space of the 'ruler's mistress' could not be comfortably incorporated into the courtly environment. She may be a courtier's wife, sister, or even a complete outsider like Jane Shore, but once she reciprocates the romantic interest of the ruler she is transformed into his 'mistress' in the modern sense who has no official role at court; she thus occupies no legitimate position and has no legitimate access to power or influence. Dramatists were then confronted with a challenge when representing her on the early modern stage and selected to negotiate her position by having her usurp the roles or prerogatives of other, established, figures within the courtly circle. These usurped prerogatives were troubling in that they undermined the integrity of established social categories, but when this usurpation was limited to that of the queenly prerogative it at least did not exceed traditional gender boundaries – that is, the 'ruler's mistress' was not operating outside of traditionally feminine spheres of influence. The dangerous forms of usurpation concerned the prerogatives that belonged to the ruler's councillor or favourite, for these roles were traditionally male and by usurping these particular roles the 'ruler's mistress' was able to wield political (and thereby masculine) authority. This political influence could develop into a wholesale usurpation of the ruler's own masculinity, undermining his identity as a man and consequently as a ruler; this usurpation could even spread from the head downwards toward the limbs of the body politic, infecting the male subjects of the emasculated ruler and allowing the 'ruler's mistress' to usurp the subjects' own

masculine identities, specifically social roles that are properly male. Ultimately, the 'ruler's mistress' did not allow herself to be relegated to the side-lines at court.

The dramatists under discussion in this chapter demonstrated the troublesome nature of a woman whose access to the ruler enabled her to usurp the powers and prerogatives of others; the 'ruler's mistress's' illegitimate position thus made her a threat to the traditional patriarchal structures that governed early modern society. In their portrayal of this controversial figure the playwrights usually balanced this threat by selecting 'sexual mistresses' who would not stir excessive controversy amongst the audience, focusing on distant historical figures and fictional characters. The dramatists under discussion in the next chapter responded differently, selecting to portray Anne Boleyn on the early modern stage and thus evoking recent and controversial history in their representation of England's most recent 'royal mistress'. I will continue this thesis by moving from the general to the specific – that is, from dramatic representations of 'rulers' mistresses' to dramatic representations of a particular 'ruler's mistress'. The potential for the 'ruler's mistress' to be characterised as a villain or corrupting influence at the heart of society is one that the dramatists largely resisted, as I will illustrate in the next chapter, when they address the figure of Anne Boleyn who could be and had been popularly demonised. I will demonstrate that dramatists' representation of the most recent and prominent 'royal mistress' reveals their efforts to avoid simplistic characterisations of the emerging 'modern mistress'; they do so by representing the controversial Anne Boleyn as something other than a villain, the antithesis or enemy of the legitimate wife, or as a shameful stain on history/society. They use a strategy to provide a dramatic portrayal that reflects

early modern historical sources, and they thus spread this message about Anne Boleyn to a theatrical public that clarifies the popular understanding of this renowned 'royal mistress' and therefore the role of 'royal mistress' in its entirety.

CHAPTER THREE

Representations of Anne Boleyn in Print and on Stage

A pamphlet published in 1558 described the procession of Elizabeth I through the streets of London immediately prior to her coronation. Presented with several pageants celebrating her accession, the young queen witnessed one particular entertainment in which her ancestors appeared in a family tableau – including her mother, Anne Boleyn. The accompanying verse describes Elizabeth's parentage as follows: 'Of whom as heire to both, Henry the eyght did spring, / In whose seat his true heire thou quene Elisabeth dost sit'.²²¹ Noticeably absent from this text is any mention of Elizabeth's mother, an omission that sits uncomfortably with her physical presence in the family tableau.²²² This is a dramatic representation of Anne Boleyn that perfectly illustrates the difficulty with which early modern writers and performers approached the subject of England's first executed queen, a convicted adulteress who is nevertheless the mother of England's popular new monarch. The creator of this spectacle acknowledges her existence by including her in the tableau yet avoids addressing

²²¹ Anonymous, *The passage of our most drad Soueraigne Lady Quene Elyzabeth* (London: 1558), B2^v.

²²² William Leahy, '“You cannot show me:” Two Tudor Coronation Processions, Shakespeare's King Henry VIII and the Staging of Anne Boleyn', *EnterText* 3.1 (2003), pp. 132-44 (pp. 135, 138). See Hester Lee-Jeffries, 'Location as Metaphor in Queen Elizabeth's Coronation Entry (1559): *Veritas Temporis Filia*', in *The Progresses, Pageants, & Entertainments of Queen Elizabeth I*, ed. by Jayne Elisabeth Archer, Elizabeth Goldring, and Sarah Knight (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 65-85 (p. 72).

her awkward presence in the accompanying rhyme, preferring instead to present the new monarch as solely the progeny of her father. It is such strategies of evasion used to represent a woman primarily known for her pre-marital role as the ‘King’s mistress’ that I will explore throughout this chapter.

I will address the difficulties in representing Anne Boleyn on the early modern stage, creating a case study of England’s most notorious and – from the early modern perspective –most recent ‘royal mistress’ in its modern meaning. In so doing I will demonstrate that dramatists use evasive tactics to portray this figure, tactics inspired by the methodology of historical chroniclers; I will also show that these dramatists modified their response to accommodate Anne Boleyn’s popular resurgence as the proto-Protestant mother of Elizabeth I. This strategy of evasion, as I call it, is a development of the representational strategy utilised to depict the ‘ruler’s mistress’ as outlined in the previous chapter. Unlike in the case of Jane Shore, it would not be appropriate to depict a woman who could be simultaneously perceived as a royal adulteress and Protestant martyr as a benign usurper of queenly prerogative. Anne Boleyn was not willing to co-exist with the King’s ‘rightful’ wife, nor did she wish to be depicted as a transgressive virago inhabiting masculine roles and identities. This particular ‘sexual mistress’ helped usher in the Reformation and produced England’s Gloriana, and therefore playwrights recognised that in depicting Anne they would need to create a more nuanced portrayal of this particular ‘ruler’s mistress’ than those effected by the likes of Heywood and Massinger. They achieved their objective by avoiding representing Anne Boleyn as an illegitimate usurper of others’ prerogatives and instead adopted evasive tactics, ones that avoid vilification or simplification but

simultaneously efface Anne from the narrative of her life. In Anne Boleyn, the ‘ruler’s mistress’ develops beyond illegitimate to become ambivalent.

I will begin by exploring the representation of Anne Boleyn in non-dramatic literary sources, specifically the printed and thus widely-disseminated chronicles of English history which include an account of her life and death. I will show the gradual shift in attitude towards Anne Boleyn as time progressed. Moreover, I will demonstrate that there are recurring patterns that emerge in Anne’s literary representation, of which the following are the most persistent: the vilification of Henry VIII; the tendency to conflate Anne Boleyn with her marital and dynastic predecessor, Catherine of Aragon; and finally the vindication of Anne through the glorious accession of her daughter, England’s first Protestant Queen Regnant, and the corresponding inclination amongst historians to acknowledge and venerate Anne Boleyn’s own supposed Protestant credentials.

Having established these patterns in chronicle representations of Anne Boleyn, I will turn my attention to her presence on the early modern stage. I argue that in the few historical plays that directly address the reigns of Henry VIII and his children, Anne Boleyn is a shadowy figure. I will explore the context of these texts, demonstrating that William Shakespeare and John Fletcher’s *Henry VIII* is the only extant play in which the character of Anne Boleyn is allowed any theatrical presence. It is therefore one of the chief texts under discussion in this chapter. I will then show how a later text, Richard Brome’s *The Queen and Concubine*, adapts its source material in such a manner that it patently encourages an audience to perceive specific parallels to the Anne Boleyn narrative, in particular its portrayal of a ‘royal mistress’s’ ruthless usurpation of the Queen’s marital and royal position as well as the characterisation of the central

protagonists. Consequently, it is these two plays which will comprise the core of my analysis in this chapter, during which I will demonstrate that the recurring representational patterns in the historical sources mentioned above find their dramatic counterparts in these two plays; furthermore, these patterns of narrating Anne Boleyn's life provide the playwrights with the foundation for their general strategy of evasion in their portrayals of Anne Boleyn.

The unlikely accession of Anne's sole surviving child in 1558 meant that the uncomfortable cultural memory of Anne Boleyn resurfaced and required tactful management. Chroniclers and playwrights who were too critical of a royal dynasty could incur royal displeasure and potentially suffer the indignity of censorship. Theatrical censorship primarily fell under the purview of the court, and its members recognised the potential power in the theatre should it be entirely unregulated. Both Elizabeth and the Stuart dynasty frequently relied upon Parliament to provide them with required money, specifically taxation that would be 'assessed and collected by local gentry, who systematically under-assessed themselves and placed the burden on lower ranks'.²²³ The process of raising money thus required '[t]he consent and approval of the "political nation" ' which could be swayed by 'the opinion-forming and sustaining aspects of the culture' (Heinemann, p. 167) – of which the theatre was a notable example. As Heinemann notes, drama 'was a formative and potentially subversive influence' (Heinemann, p. 167), and therefore the master of the revels's role in preventing

²²³ Margot Heinemann, 'Political Drama', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama*, ed. by A. R. Braunmuller and Michael Hattaway, 2nd edn (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990, repr. 2003), pp. 164-196 (p. 167).

controversial matter from being publicly performed was of considerable political significance. However, Dutton contends that the relationship between the master of the revels and the theatre companies were not merely antagonistic but mutually interdependent,²²⁴ with ‘the office of the master of the revels [developing] symbiotically with the growth of the theatrical profession’ (Dutton, p. 225). Nevertheless, he was not the sole interested party at court while the city of London authorities often flexed their supervisory muscles. The latter sometimes proved sufficiently hostile to the companies that the master of the revels could be perceived as their protector rather than regulator (Dutton, p. 227). The changing political landscape could render certain plays offensive at one time and not at another, but the theatrical practice of ‘veiling’ topical references rendered many a work sufficiently unprovocative.

What is clear from the application of theatrical censorship is the complicated relationship between the court and the theatre, characterised by symbiosis, protection, and potential antagonism. The practice of disguising contemporary references allowed for subversive portrayals such as that of an executed English Queen whose life remained controversial – as is the case with *The Queen and Concubine*. The cultural response to the emerging figure of the ‘modern mistress’ reaches its apotheosis in Anne Boleyn, who even as an historical personage defies simple categorisation and whose presence in both historical narratives and plays must be handled sensitively. For instance, when and how Anne’s relationship with Henry VIII became sexual is obscure but

²²⁴ Richard Dutton, ‘Jurisdiction of Theater and Censorship’, in *Literature and Censorship in Renaissance England*, ed. by Hadfield, pp. 223-236 (p. 224).

certainly preceded their marriage, as evidenced by Elizabeth's birth. The technical validity of their marriage is also controversial, considering the unsavoury legal wrangling that preceded and succeeded their secret wedding. Those who did and do doubt the legality of the marriage would perceive Anne Boleyn as a 'sexual mistress' who never was Henry's wife; those who do consider the marriage legitimate would nevertheless have to acknowledge that in the six years or so prior to the marriage, Henry and Anne indulged in a mutual relationship that was inevitably leading toward sexual consummation. As such, Anne Boleyn must be categorised as a 'mistress' in its modern meaning. She was not the indiscriminate whore or selective courtesan, nor does she occupy the role of concubine because Catherine of Aragon maintained her role as domestic partner and Anne refused to be merely a de facto wife without the trappings of legitimacy. I specifically selected Anne Boleyn as my 'sexual mistress' case study because her portrayal intersects with my other chapters: she is a 'ruler's mistress' who is actively pursued by her future lover and who is a key participant in two trials. She embodies all the elements of how the 'mistress' in the modern meaning was created performatively on the early modern stage and the complexities therein, and I will demonstrate how the strategy of evasion utilised by various dramatists prevents simplistic characterisation. I contend that their methods for evading Anne can be distilled into three particular tactics, all utilised by the playwrights under discussion in this chapter and patently inspired by comparable approaches to the Anne Boleyn narrative in historical sources.

The first tactic that I will examine in the overall 'evasion strategy' is that of displacement. Much as the favourite acted as a scapegoat for the ruler's transgressions, Anne Boleyn became the scapegoat for destroying the King's

marriage, and her role as royal home-wrecker has traditionally comprised a significant facet of her character in cultural memory. However, the dramatists under discussion in this chapter respond by displacing the blame, or sexual culpability, in representations of Anne Boleyn. As such, the opprobrium that could so easily be attached to Anne as an ambitious, loose ‘sexual mistress’ is instead attributed to other (largely male) characters, the most prominent and consistent of whom is the King. I argue that though such displacement prevents the simplistic vilification of Anne Boleyn, it requires a dramatic negotiation that means Anne Boleyn is partially effaced from her own narrative.

My analysis will also focus on the tactic of ‘conflation’ in representations of Anne Boleyn and Catherine of Aragon. Building upon the moral and political tendency to polarize opposing political, religious, and sexual forces in historical narratives, I explore the playwrights’ efforts to conflate these traditionally binary figures in conventional narratives. I will particularly focus on the religious affiliations of Henry’s two wives, demonstrating that far from polarizing Catherine and Anne as binary forces of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism respectively, the dramatists unexpectedly conflate the two women. This tactic of conflation is expressed most clearly through the representation of the Catherine-figure, and it therefore contributes toward the general strategy of evasion by depriving Henry’s second wife of another central component of her cultural memory which distinguishes her from her queenly rival: her religion.

I will conclude this part of the chapter with a study of the ways in which dramatists portray Anne through her daughter Elizabeth, reflecting the difficulty that playwrights confronted with the conclusion of Anne Boleyn’s narrative: how to acknowledge her unfortunate demise as memorialised in the cultural memory

of an early modern theatre audience but nevertheless recognise that her legacy – immortalised in her progeny – was positive. It is through representing Anne Boleyn's legacy that the playwrights prevent the entire effacement of this controversial woman, who occupies the cultural and social space of the 'mistress' in its modern meaning, from her own narrative, rendering her ambivalent rather than invisible. I will demonstrate that *Henry VIII* and *The Queen and Concubine* engage in similar processes of evasion but use different strategies.

Previous work on the subject of Anne Boleyn on the early modern stage often features as appendices to more substantial studies on, for example, the cultural legacy of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. There have been two noted works on the afterlives of Anne Boleyn's husband and daughter, providing informative studies of the development and manipulation of 'posthumous political and literary' afterlives, and I am certainly indebted to these substantial works in my approach to Anne Boleyn.²²⁵ Anne inevitably features on the periphery of such studies, but there have been few substantial academic studies of Anne Boleyn in early modern theatre. Susan Frye provides a useful contextualisation of *Henry VIII*, arguing that one should read the character of Katherine in the play through the lens of Queen Anna of Denmark, noting that shared names and staged locations highlight the connection between the historical events in the play and contemporary life. Although I will not adopt the same approach regarding *Henry VIII*, Frye does

²²⁵ 'Introduction' by Mark Rankin, Christopher Highley and John N. King, ed., *Henry VIII and his Afterlives: Literature, Politics, and Art* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 1-11 (p. 5). See also Michael Dobson and Nicola J. Watson, *England's Elizabeth: An Afterlife in Fame and Fantasy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

acknowledge the potential of playwrights to utilize historical figures as a means of portraying contemporary or controversial personages: ‘Even though a number of studies focus on the character of Katherine – as she relates to Hermione or Vittoria Corombona, to the Virgin Mary, or to Frances Howard, whose divorce trial was ongoing – the points of resemblance with Anne of Denmark are only now becoming apparent.’²²⁶ A comparable process, I shall argue, occurs in *The Queen and the Concubine*, when the audience is encouraged to perceive similarities between the fictional Alynda and the historical Anne.

An underdeveloped area of research concerns the similarities between Shakespeare and Fletcher’s *Henry VIII* and Brome’s *The Queen and Concubine*, with few scholars examining Brome’s later play as an alternative reading of the Anne Boleyn story. Lucy Munro is the exception: in the introduction to her online edition of *The Queen and Concubine*, Munro considers the dramatic debt that the later play owes to Shakespeare and Fletcher in addition to the subtle nuances of Eulalia’s character that recall elements of Catherine of Aragon’s purported behaviour, all of which inspired me to explore *The Queen and Concubine* in further detail as a text which successfully incorporates Anne Boleyn’s narrative within an adaptation of Robert Greene’s source text from *Penelope’s Web*.

My approach differs from that of these previous writers in focusing on the dramatic figure of Anne herself rather than the ways in which she contributes to the cultural afterlife of other members of her immediate family; furthermore, my

²²⁶ Susan Frye, ‘Anne of Denmark and the Historical Contextualisation of Shakespeare and Fletcher’s *Henry VIII*, in *Women and Politics in Early Modern England, 1450-1700*, ed. by James Daybell (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 180-193 (p. 183).

research is not bound to any one particular play, unlike the editors of the individual texts under discussion who provide the most intriguing insights into the relevant texts' relationship with early modern historiography. I am also indebted to previous work on Shakespearean 'histories' for their analysis of the dialogic relationship between chronicle and play, history and the public.²²⁷ It is such work that encouraged me to begin my research with the careful examination of non-dramatic sources on Anne Boleyn, the subject of the next section of this chapter.

1. Representing Anne Boleyn in Non-Dramatic Literature

In this section I will illustrate how Anne Boleyn was remembered and regarded in the wider early modern community. This task is necessary as it will allow me to understand what exactly comprises the cultural memory of Anne Boleyn. In this respect I follow the advice of Lopez: 'It is essential to historicize audience response in order to be confident [...] in making claims about what playwrights expected of dramatic action and their audiences'.²²⁸ Printed historical sources were in dialogue with the expectations and desires of their projected readership, with each party responding to and developing how history is remembered. I contend that a careful examination of non-dramatic accounts of Anne Boleyn's life will enable one to gain an understanding of the prevailing perceptions of England's first executed queen. More importantly, I will demonstrate that there were recurring patterns in Anne's literary representation,

²²⁷ Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare: The Histories* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000).

²²⁸ Jeremy Lopez, *Theatrical Convention and Audience Response in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 14.

patterns that would be adopted and adapted by early modern dramatists as tactics with which to portray Anne Boleyn on stage.

In examining the representation of Anne Boleyn in non-dramatic accounts, I have chosen to focus only on printed, English sources. The reason for this is that I wish to establish how the early modern English public in general would have perceived Anne Boleyn, and consequently the more widely disseminated printed text in the native language gains precedent over the manuscript and foreign language source. A traditional chronological approach to these texts would not be practical, for the representational patterns I detected in historical sources did not follow a strict chronological trajectory. I have therefore subdivided this section by patterns which developed in historical sources as time progressed. These sections are 'Finding a Villain', 'Conflating the Wives', and 'Redemption in Progeny'.

a) Finding a Villain

There are few contemporary accounts of Anne's life and death amongst surviving English literature. One of the earliest texts to address her in detail was *The Pilgrim* (1546), which largely consists of a defence of Henry VIII. Thomas refers to Anne's 'liberal life' as 'too shameful to rehearse' and describing the depths to which her 'carnal appetite' led her:

she fled not so much as the company of her own natural brother, besides the company of some three or four others of the gallantest gentlemen that were about the King's proper person, who were all so familiarly drawn into her train by her

own devilish devices, [...] [the King] was forced to proceed therein by way of open justice, where the matter was manifested unto the whole world.²²⁹

This text emphasises the justice of Anne's conviction, portraying her as a lascivious, deceptive woman capable of regicide; notably, Thomas credits Anne with diabolical powers capable of destroying multiple men. He similarly exonerates Henry from any blame, depicting his actions as 'forced' and necessary in order to maintain 'open justice' within his realm. He concludes his description of Anne's fall with a brief acknowledgement of her 'very witty and gentle' daughter, foreshadowing the careful path navigated by Elizabethan writers when obliged to appease their monarch yet still relate a semi-accurate account of her mother's death at the command of her father.

Edward Hall presents Anne's career far more favourably;²³⁰ however, he is keen to absolve Henry VIII from any marital malfeasance, preferring to present the King as subject to erroneous counsel when selecting his first wife: 'the kyng was moued, by some of his coũsail [...] to take to wife the lady Katherin [...] the kyng beyng young, and not understanding the lawe of God, espoused the saied lady Katherine' (Hall, p. 507). Already hinting that the marriage was against God's law, Hall discreetly develops this point by alluding to popular whispers against the match before overtly agreeing with the determination of educational institutions that it was unlawful. Further 'murmurings' (Hall, p. 812) against

²²⁹ William Thomas, *The Pilgrim* (London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, 1861), p. 56.

²³⁰ Edward Hall, *Hall's Chronicle* (London: 1809), p. 759.

Henry's marriage to Anne are attributed to seditious intent, specifically aimed to remove the king from power.

The only area in the Anne story that troubles Hall concerns the dubious legality of her marriage to Henry. He is keen to avoid any direct criticism of the parties involved, preferring to channel his observations through the words of 'many wise menne' who observed 'that the king was not well counsailed' (Hall, p. 796). Having suggested that the dubious legality of her marriage left Anne vulnerable to such legal manoeuvres, Hall declines to elaborate on the causes for and justice of her death beyond stating that the charge was 'high treason' (Hall, p. 819). However, some sympathy for her plight may be evinced in his inclusion of the entirety of her scaffold speech, thus providing Anne with the voice that is lacking in the earlier account of her life. In sum, Hall presents a generally sympathetic account of Anne Boleyn's career which he achieves through evasion. He avoids explicitly condemning anyone in particular while displacing blame onto the anonymous 'murmuring' figures who ill-advised the parties involved. This influential chronicle demonstrates the emerging difficulty in addressing Anne or Henry's culpability in the events that transpired before 1536.

An important account of Anne Boleyn's career was written by John Slaydan (1560). Evidently popular, this text was quoted by more than one subsequent chronicler. Slaydan suggests that Henry had suffered from the 'scrupulositie of his conscience', and when he confronted Catherine with his doubts '[s]he aunswereth that it is to late nowe to examine the licence, whche so

longe synce they had allowed'.²³¹ However, his subsequent mention of Catherine's multiple miscarriages and the fact that she only bore one healthy daughter is suggestive; it indicates that Henry's motives for an annulment are less spiritual than he claims. Anne is initially described as 'an excellent beautie' from among 'the quenes maydes', 'whome the kyng began to fantasy, in so much as men might easelye perceyue that he enteded to marrie her to his wyfe' (fol. 114^v). Anne then disappears for the rest of the ninth book, only to re-emerge in the tenth in the depiction of her arrest and death.

Slaydan's portrayal of Anne's demise may be comparatively brief, but he breaks with literary tradition by explicitly identifying her fate as unjust:

the kynge of Englande hauyng co[n]dempned his wyue Quene Anne, of adultrye and incest, but vniustly as it is supposed and prouen synce, causeth her head to be stryken of (fol. 140^r).

Anne's death is now presented as something of a conspiracy, with others specifically held accountable for her arrest and execution. In the 1560s, it seems, it was now possible to declare Anne innocent and even indicate that in some ways her husband was culpable. Slaydan's overt judgement of the justice of Anne's fate is quoted in Richard Grafton's 1569 *Chronicle*, indicating that the earlier writer

²³¹ John Slaydan, *A famous cronicle of oure time, called Sleidanus Commentaries* (London: 1560), fol.114^v.

was atypical in his courage (or indiscretion) and that nine years later chroniclers were reluctant explicitly to assign blame.²³²

The first noteworthy Jacobean chronicle account was *The history of Great Britaine* (1611), a source text for *Henry VIII*. Here Anne is portrayed as a principal player in the English Reformation, with Speed noting that she was ‘chiefe’ among ‘the maintainers of the Gospell,’ and Henry’s marriage to Catherine is characterised as a sin erroneously countenanced by the corrupt Pope.²³³ This chronicle differentiates itself from its Elizabethan forebears through its presentation of Anne’s fall. In a wonderful piece of circumlocutory logic, the writer manages to characterise the destruction of Anne Boleyn as both part of a providential plan *and* a consequence of Henry’s fickleness:

the Kings affection wandring elsewhere, gaue them occasion to worke on that Subiect, which God in his wisdom would haue downe, lest his deliuerance from the bondage of darknesse should be attributed to any fleshly arme, or that shee who then sate in the throne of the worlds full felicity, should fixe her sense on so fickle a Center, who hauing had experience what it was to bee a Prince, must henceforth practise the patience of a poore prisoner, which in the third yeere of her marriage, and second of May, to act the wofull Scene of her Tragedy, shee came vpon the Stage, being sent to the Tower of *London*, and charged with high Treason against the King.

²³² Richard Grafton, *A chronicle at large and meere history of the affayres of Englande* (London: 1569), p. 1228.

²³³ John Speed, *The history of Great Britaine* (London: 1611), p. 771.

In one passage, Anne's fate is variously characterised as the consequence of marital disharmony, divine intervention, and the culminating act of a tragedy. The most intriguing aspect of this portrayal is the subtle condemnation of Henry as an unfaithful husband; despite the author's attempts to transform Anne's narrative into that of a saint suffering the requisite tribulations that will ensure her entrance into heaven, the more convincing storyline is that of a husband's wandering eye.

Nevertheless, Speed refuses explicitly to address the (in)justice of Anne's arrest and execution. Instead, he follows Grafton's example in quoting the same passage from Slaydan which defends Anne from accusations of adultery and incest. Clearly this account is still mired in the diplomatic intricacies of Elizabethan narratives concerning Anne Boleyn, relying on anti-Catholic invective and evasive ruminations as to the justice of her death. However, there is a movement toward questioning Henry VIII's role in the matter and evidently this pattern troubled William Martyn enough to defend Henry in 1615: 'The King (pretending nothing in this businesse, but Truth, sinceritie and justice, according to the Lawes of God and Man)'.²³⁴ Henry nonetheless emerges from this narrative somewhat compromised by the speed with which he eventually determines that the said marriage is unlawful and that he may seek another bride elsewhere: 'whereupon the King resolving in his conscience, that his said mariage was void in Law, began to bend his loue and kinde affections to a goodly, faire, and beautifull Ladie in his Court, named *Anne Bullen*' (Martyn, p. 389). Anne may be praised, but I note some discomfort in Martyn's portrayal of the King – specifically, the manner in which Henry makes the final, legal judgement as to the

²³⁴ William Martyn, *The historie, and liues, of the kings of England* (London: 1615), p. 378.

validity of his marriage in response to the stirrings of his conscience – not exactly a constitutional nor impartial determination, and further undermined by Martyn's subsequent statement regarding the King's new affection for another woman. Later referred to as a 'Tragedie', Anne's fate is given a sardonic edge through Martyn's description of the doomed Queen as '*sometimes the King's dearest wife*' (Martyn, p. 403). Such remarks serve to belittle the King's supposed integrity even if Martyn does not overtly address Henry's behaviour or decisions.

English protestants plea (1621) manages tacitly to criticise Henry VIII, characterising the King's break with Rome as a petulant act inspired by the Pope's refusal to allow 'his putting away his wife Queen Katherine, that holie Ladie of Spayne'.²³⁵ This reference to the holiness of Catherine would usually bode ill for representations of Anne, with many religious writers juxtaposing the two Queens as religious, political, and sexual rivals. However, Broughton's portrayal of Anne is discreet:

Then the King, contrary to the good liking of all men, married Anne Bulleyne, by whom he had the Ladie Elizabeth [...] And presently after her birth, he pickt a quarrell against Queene Anne [...] & made a new acte of Parlament, whereby it was enacted, that it should be heigh treason, for any to iustifie his former marriage to be lawfull, and the next day after her behedding, he married her hand-maid (Broughton, p. 90).

This account is obviously dismissive of Henry's machinations, but beyond a mention of popular disapproval of Anne and Henry's marriage, there is no

²³⁵ Richard Broughton, *English protestants plea* (Saint-Omer: 1621), p. 89.

criticism of Anne herself. More than anything else, she is depicted as a victim of Henry VIII's whims – much like the 'holie ladie of Spaine'.

William Camden (1625) followed the pattern established by Broughton by subtly criticising the conduct of Henry VIII while remaining sympathetic toward his wives. Camden attributes the King's 'Great Matter' primarily to his love for Anne; revealingly, he characterises the King's pursuit of the woman in question as somewhat shameful, observing how he was unable 'to ouercome her chastity' and thus sought her as his 'wife, in hope to haue a Linage by her'.²³⁶ Henry's seduction efforts are not too dissimilar to accounts of rape, suggesting that both his methods and intentions were (at least initially) dishonourable, and only Anne's strong 'chastity' and 'modest behauieur' prevented events from turning out quite differently. Camden is also sympathetic toward Catherine, she of 'pious couersation, and of the *Spanish* grauitie', who is presented as a victim of both Henry and Cardinal Wolsey. Anne's death is again attributed to Henry's changeable nature:

Neuerthelesse three yeeres scarce passed, but giuing himselfe to new Loues, to distrusts, to wrath, to murther, and to bloud; to make way to new Loue *Iane Seymor*, he accused *Anne* (who had miscarried of a Male-Childe) to haue defiled his Bed, and for a light suspition put her into the hand of iustice (Camden, D2^v).

The mention of the miscarriage provides further insight into Henry's state of mind when he suddenly decided to alter his marital policy, raising the question of whether it was this personal and dynastic tragedy which prompted the King to seek a permanent separation from his wife. Camden alludes to Anne's effective

²³⁶ William Camden, *Annales* (London: 1625), C2^r.

defence of herself at trial, before describing her quiet, Christian death, all now familiar tropes of accounts that present Anne as a royal victim. Francis Godwin does not deviate from this representational pattern in 1630, producing a text that identifies Catherine as ‘a noble and a vertuous Lady’, albeit one who ‘had liued so long, as to make Husband weary of her’.²³⁷ He thus also portrays Anne as victim and Henry as villain.

As with historical analyses of Anne Boleyn’s fall today, the early modern chroniclers attempted to explain the political and personal turmoil that accompanied Anne’s rise and demise. Consequently, there is a concerted effort to assign blame in the accounts published between 1533 and 1642. What the above cited passages have demonstrated is that early efforts to vilify Anne Boleyn as the adulterous ‘sexual mistress’ who wreaked havoc upon her country were abandoned in favour of assigning blame elsewhere, firstly to her Catholic and/or political opponents conspiring in her downfall, and then to Henry VIII. This vilification is a representational pattern in historical accounts, and I will demonstrate that playwrights adopted a comparable approach in dramatizing Anne Boleyn, adapting this pattern of vilification into a tactic with which to displace Anne Boleyn even as they dramatize her life.

b) Conflating the Wives

The accounts above resist vilifying Catherine of Aragon, Anne’s nemesis, who as a foreign Catholic princess should have been an easy target for the proudly xenophobic and newly-Protestant England. However, what is apparent in

²³⁷ Francis Godwin, *Annales of England* (London: 1630), p. 66 / K2^v.

the texts is an increasing tendency to identify both of Henry's wives as his victims, as I observed in the Broughton and Camden accounts. This is indicative of another representational pattern, the conflation of Catherine and Anne, to which I will now direct my attention.

In 1559, Elizabeth I's Bishop of London John Aylmer produced a literary riposte to John Knox's notorious *Regiment of Women*. In his enumeration of virtuous, influential women, Aylmer credits Anne Boleyn as the catalyst for the English Reformation:

VWas not Quene Anne the mother of this blessed vvoman [Elizabeth], the chief, first, and only cause of bany shing the beast of Rome, vvith all his beggerly baggage? vvas there euer in Englande a greater feate vvrought by any ma[n] then thus vvas by a vvoman? ²³⁸

Considering that Aylmer was the public servant of Anne's daughter, it is unsurprising that she is included in the pantheon of remarkable women. More surprising is the following passage:

VWho killed the Scot|tish king, when Henry .8. was in Fraunce? a woman, or at the least her army? who brought in the light of gods worde into Englande? a woman, who lighteth now again the candle after it was put oute? a woman.

The second two women are Anne and Elizabeth respectively; the first is Catherine of Aragon, the Regent of England when England decisively beat Scotland at the Battle of Flodden. This passage reveals Aylmer's respect for Catherine, famously Anne's romantic, political, and religious rival, and consequently an easy target for

²³⁸ John Aylmer, *An harborovve for faithfull and trevve suiectes* (London: 1559), C1v.

vilification by Anne-partisans. As Maria Dowling observes, '[i]n a surprising passage Aylmer praises Catherine of Aragon as well as Anne and Elizabeth, and unequivocally links these last two as promoters of the Reformation'.²³⁹ In his work Alymer conflates the rival wives as two impressive and influential ruling women, and in so doing he provides the first overt example of the representational pattern that emerged in subsequent accounts of Henry VIII's reign: the conflation of the wives.

William Slatyer's 1621 poem illustrates the marital and political adventures of Henry VIII, during which he lists Henry's various wives. The poet remarks that Henry chose to 'disauowe' 'Queene *Maries* mother' despite foreign and domestic protest and then:

Queene *Eliza*'s mother soone was seene

Pembrookes Marchionesse, *Englands* Queene:

And when *Anne Bulleine* lost her head,

Iane Seymour next, in Childbirth dead.²⁴⁰

All of Henry's troubled marriages feature in this poem, emphasising the unity of these discarded women. This general conflation of the King's wives is enhanced by Slatyer's identification of both Catherine and Anne in terms of their maternity, describing them as Marie's mother and Eliza's mother respectively. This text gives a clear example of the manner in which both Catherine and Anne may be

²³⁹ Maria Dowling (1990), 'II William Latymer's Chronickille of Anne Bulleyne', *Camden Fourth Series*, 39 (1990), 23-65 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0068690500004591>> (p. 42).

²⁴⁰ William Slatyer, *The history of Great Britanie* (London: 1621), p. 275 / Z6^r.

displaced in narratives of their lives by their respective daughters, with writers such as Slatyer choosing to recognise them solely as the mothers of England's two Queens Regnant. In so doing the writer conflates the two women as mothers of Tudor daughters / Queens as well as Henry's wives.

Grafton's *Chronicle* has another notable example of conflation, yet this conflation occurs along different lines to Aylmer's. Critical of Catherine in a way that few other chroniclers are, Grafton nonetheless makes a telling error: having titled her 'Lady Katherin Princes Dowager' (p. 1222) following Anne's coronation, he later slips up and refers to her as '[t]he Queene' (p. 1222). Grafton's mistaken use of conflicting titles is indicative of the ambivalence felt about Anne and Catherine, both victims of supposedly dubious marriages and both identified as Queens during their lifetimes. This apparent inclination to conflate Henry VIII's first two wives may be explained by the corresponding historical urge to blame the King for what transpired during Anne Boleyn's brief lifetime. As Henry emerges as the villain of the narrative, there also emerges a space for the victims of his romantic and dynastic actions: Catherine and Anne, both sacrifices to his lustful or political machinations.

c) Redemption in Progeny

As England's first Protestant Queen, Elizabeth I's popularity, longevity and comparative success as a monarch meant that the memory of Anne Boleyn was reinterpreted in the manner of religious hagiography: as the mother of the symbol for English Protestantism, Anne was reframed in national cultural memory as a proto-Protestant, an undoubted reformer whose influence on King and country paved the way for her greatest religious gift, that of Elizabeth herself.

This revisionist process meant that the memory of Anne was resurrected, but she was now displaced in the narrative of her life by her own child; it was far simpler to remember Anne as Elizabeth I's persecuted, Protestant mother than as an ambitious former 'sexual mistress' whose reign and character were far more complex than would be acknowledged in a hagiography. By displacing Anne in narratives of her life with her daughter, writers are able to redeem the disgraced 'sexual mistress'; they may now identify her not as a treasonous adulteress but as the mother of England's divinely-favoured Queen. No doubt many writers were attracted to this method of representing Anne Boleyn because it negotiates her real presence in historical and dramatic narratives while avoiding much of the controversy of Anne's rise and fall.

An early example of Anne Boleyn's displacement by Elizabeth occurs in the 1570 edition John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, in which he argues the following:

what so euer can be conceiued of man against that vertuous Queene, I obiecte and oppose agayn [...] the euident demonstration of Gods fauoure, in manteyning, preseruing, and aduansing þ^e ofspring of her bodye, the Lady ELIZABETH, nowe Queene.²⁴¹

The most significant and influential element of Foxe's apologia for Anne Boleyn is his suggestion that Elizabeth, the embodiment of Anne's Protestant legacy, is evidence of Anne's innocence - a nakedly sinful woman could not have provided England with their Gloriana. Although Foxe devotes some time to highlighting Anne's supposed Protestant endeavours, he is at his most persuasive when

²⁴¹ John Foxe, *The first volume of the ecclesiasticall history* (London: 1570), p. 1233.

developing the notion that Anne's life may and can be redeemed through the magnificence of her child. This entails a displacement of Anne Boleyn in her own narrative by her daughter, an influential literary device shared by historians and playwrights.

One historical account that adopts Foxe's approach is Godwin's *Annales of England* (1630). A Caroline writer evidently affected by nostalgia for Elizabeth's reign, Godwin dismisses Anne's trial as a show trial and declares that 'an Act of Parliament against her shall not worke on [his] beliefe' (Godwin, p. 141/ T3⁹). One of the two reasons he gives for believing the accusations to be false is the subsequent glorious rule of Anne's daughter, indicative of divine approval:

There are two reasons which sway much with mee in the behalfe of the Queene. That her Daughter the Lady ELIZABETH was seated in the Royall Throne, where shee for so many yeares ruled so happily and triumphantly. What shall we thinke, but that the Divine Goodnesse was pleased to recompence the iust calamity of the Mother, in the glorious prosperity of the Daughter? (Godwin, p. 142/ T4⁹).

Tellingly, the other reason concerned the speed with which the King remarried following Anne's execution, indicating that his desire for another woman influenced his decision to end his marriage. These two reasons are further examples of the displacement that occurs in representations of Anne Boleyn, specifically her displacement through reference to her corrupt former spouse and to her glorious progeny. By focusing on Henry's misbehaviour and Elizabeth's subsequent rule, the writer manages to portray Anne as innocent without really portraying her at all.

Another example of Anne Boleyn's redemption and displacement through her progeny occurs in a sermon by Miles Mosse entitled *Scotlands welcome*. The brief mention of Elizabeth's parentage is striking in its presentation of a Protestant, parental unit:

Her father (*King Henry the Eight*) had made some entrance to the *Gospell*, and wounded deeply the heary scalpe of *Antichrist*: and master *Foxe* recordeth it to posterity, that if he had liued, his purpose was wholly to haue purged the *Church* from idolatry. Her mother the *Lady Ann*[...] *Bulleine*, was a woman very religious, and vertuous, and full of good works. According to the godlinesse of the *Parents* was the godly e|ducation of the child.²⁴²

Mosse presents what has erstwhile been an ill-fated political and personal union as a religious triumph in its production of Elizabeth, a pious reinterpretation of Anne's life that reduced her to little more than a Protestant womb.

These accounts achieve the unlikely task of both displacing Anne Boleyn and redeeming her through Elizabeth, which is another pattern of representation utilised by scholars composing accounts of Anne Boleyn's life. The controversial 'sexual mistress', unpopular queen and executed traitor is reframed as a Protestant mother, with historians and religious writers alike depriving Anne Boleyn of a distinct identity outside of her role as Elizabeth's incubator and allowing the daughter to take centre stage in the narrative of the mother's life. In so doing, however, Anne becomes a form of blessed mother who could not be tarnished by the obviously erroneous accusations levelled against her during her lifetime. This representational pattern is the third I have explored in this chapter, the other two

²⁴² Miles Mosse, *Scotlands welcome* (London: 1603), p. 22/ B7^v.

being the vilification of Henry and the conflation of Anne with Catherine of Aragon. I will demonstrate that these patterns were adapted by certain dramatists into specific tactics with which they can represent Anne onstage while at the same time evading doing so. Before I explore these specific texts in further detail, I will first direct my attention to the depiction of Anne Boleyn within dramatic sources and thereby situate my foundational texts by Shakespeare, Fletcher and Brome within the larger literary and theatrical context.

2. Representing Anne Boleyn in Dramatic Literature

In the Prologue to *Henry VIII*, the chorus warns the audience as follows:

Only they
That come to hear a merry, bawdy play,
A noise of targets, or to see a fellow
In a long motley coat guarded with yellow,
Will be deceived (Prologue, ll. 13-17).²⁴³

The apparent reference here is to Samuel Rowley's *When You See Me, You Know Me*, a play set in Henry VIII's reign that had originally been published in 1604/5 but was reprinted in 1613. Rowley's play takes considerable liberties with the timeline of historical events; it concentrates for the most part on the Protestant

²⁴³ William Shakespeare, *Henry VIII*, The Arden Shakespeare Third Series, ed. by Gordon McMullan (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2000).

education of the young Prince Edward, and the Queen who dominates this play is Katherine Parr, Henry's final (and emphatically Protestant) wife.

Another playwright inspired by the nostalgia for Elizabeth I's rule during the years after her death was Thomas Heywood, who produced a two-part play that addresses the earlier life of Elizabeth and in particular her struggles during the reign of her sister. Published between 1605 and 1606, *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody* received multiple reprints, including one in the same year as *When You See Me* and around the time when Gordon McMullan suggests *Henry VIII* was first performed at the Globe. This demonstrates that there was a thirst for Tudors on the early modern stage between the years of 1605-13, further evidenced by biographical-history plays addressing several non-royal characters that feature in *Henry VIII*, most notably *Thomas*, *Lord Cromwell*, *Sir Thomas More* and *Cardinal Wolsey* (now lost).

Crucially, Shakespeare and Fletcher's play portrays Anne 'Bullen' as a living, speaking, interacting character, and in this respect it differs from the other plays set during Henry VIII's reign, each of which evades representing Anne even in historical contexts in which she might (or should) legitimately appear. Rowley is at least willing to name the Queen that he chooses not to dramatize, distinguishing himself from the majority of his peers who emphatically avoid even mentioning her:

GARDNER: You saw how soone his maiestie was wonne,

 To scorne the Pope, and Romes religion,

 When Queene *Anne Bullen* wore the diadem.

WOOL: *Gardner* tis true, so was the rumor spread:

But *Woolsie* wrought such meanes she lost head (*When You See Me*, 3.526-30).²⁴⁴

Anne is a cipher in this conversation, a memory evoked by two living characters which establishes their devious manipulation of political events. The only other oblique reference to Anne occurs through reference to her progeny, when the King describes his three children as '[t]he royall issue of three famous Queenes' (9.1540). She is not explicitly mentioned again.

In addition to this, *If You Know Not Me* depicts events following Anne Boleyn's death and her only connection to the play is that it portrays the troubles of her daughter Elizabeth. Evading Anne Boleyn should thus have been a simple affair, but Heywood manages to briefly conjure the memory of Anne through omission when Elizabeth is accused of treason:

If it be treason

To be the daughter to the eight Henry,

Sister to Edward, and the next in blood

Unto my gracious sovereign, now the Queen,

I am a traitor (*If You Know Not Me*, 5.409-11).²⁴⁵

Elizabeth presents herself through her familial connections but, much like the pageant discussed at the beginning of this chapter, omits the one that could only

²⁴⁴ Samuel Rowley, *When You See Me, You Know Me*, ed. by F. P. Wilson (Oxford: Malone Society, 1952).

²⁴⁵ Thomas Heywood, *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody, Part I*, ed. by Madeleine Doran (Oxford: Malone Society, 1935).

stir controversy – her mother. She instead declares herself solely the offspring of her father, an evasion that nonetheless raises the spectre of Anne Boleyn in her very absence from this meaningful family tableau. The playwrights who wrote *Thomas*, *Lord Cromwell* and *Sir Thomas More* omit Anne Boleyn from their dramatizations, despite the fact that both the courtier-ministers who form the subject of the plays partially owed their political rise and fall to Anne Boleyn. *Henry VIII* is thus the only extant early modern English play overtly to address the circumstances of Anne Boleyn's rise to social prominence – though not, as I will show, the only play to represent her in less overt ways – and is therefore central to my analysis of representations of Anne Boleyn in early modern drama.

Although it is not an overt depiction of Anne Boleyn's life, Richard Brome's *The Queen and Concubine* delineates the rise of a 'royal mistress' and her aspiration to marry the King, an ambition that results in the King placing his former wife on trial and eventually banishing her to the country. The King is willing to abuse parliamentary procedure in order to marry the woman who occupies the social and cultural space of the 'modern mistress', an act he ultimately regrets when faced with his new bride's ruthless ambition. These superficial similarities between the narrative of Anne Boleyn's life as understood in variant historical accounts and the tale dramatized by Brome are too consistent to be dismissed. Moreover, they are enhanced by Brome's dramatization of key moments in the play, most prominently the trial of Eulalia (the Queen) for adultery, a specious proceeding which justifies the King's decision to exchange wives. The playwright's portrayal of this judicial procedure distinctly echoes the trial of Hermione in *The Winter's Tale* – another wronged wife felled by a false accusation of adultery – and Katherine in *Henry VIII*. Lucy Munro discusses these

similarities in her introduction to *The Queen and Concubine*, identifying Eulalia, Hermione and Katherine as ‘neglected queens’.²⁴⁶ Brome thus conforms to a specific representational pattern when portraying Eulalia, intentionally reminding the audience of Shakespeare and Fletcher’s Katherine and consequently encouraging their identification of Eulalia with Catherine of Aragon. Once Eulalia is recognised as a Catherine-surrogate, her ambitious and socially-inferior ‘sexual mistress’ rival is inevitably identified as representative of Anne Boleyn. Consequently, when making a comparison between these female characters and the historical personages they emulate in this play, I will use the terms ‘Catherine-surrogate’ or ‘Catherine-figure’ for Eulalia and ‘Anne-surrogate’ or ‘Anne-figure’ for Alynda. Brome’s evident dramatic debt to *Henry VIII* inspires an audience to recognise further commonalities between *The Queen and Concubine* and the historical personages represented in *Henry VIII*. This play is thus another significant retelling of Anne Boleyn’s court career and one that, like *Henry VIII*, negotiates a portrayal of Anne on stage through a strategy of evasion. During the next three sections of this chapter I will demonstrate that both plays utilise the same strategy of evasion in their depiction of Anne Boleyn, a strategy that may be distilled into three specific tactics that were inspired by the representational patterns that emerged in non-dramatic sources.

3. *Henry VIII*

²⁴⁶ Lucy Munro, ‘“In lieu of former wrongs”: An Introduction to *The Queen and Concubine*’, in *The Queen and Concubine*, by Richard Brome, Richard Brome Online, <<http://hrionline.ac.uk/brome/>> [accessed 16 August 2016].

a) Displacing Blame

In earlier sections of this chapter I demonstrated how non-dramatic accounts of Anne Boleyn's life sought to assign blame for her fall, with Henry VIII emerging as the prime target for vilification in these narratives. I will now show how this representational pattern was adapted for the stage. The playwrights responsible for *Henry VIII* and *The Queen and Concubine* did not refrain from depicting the personal and political unhappiness that resulted from the King's 'Great Matter', much of which could be attributed to Anne Boleyn as an ambitious 'mistress' in the modern meaning who was the catalyst for Henry's actions; however, the dramatists negotiate their portrayal of Anne by displacing the blame or censure of Anne onto other characters – most notably the King himself. I argue that this displacement of blame prevents the easy vilification of Anne Boleyn, but this process robs her of her significance as antagonist within the drama and as a result of this negotiation she is partially effaced from the narrative of her life.

As one of the few plays of the period directly to address such controversial events in relatively recent English history, *Henry VIII* is circumspect in its portrayal of 'Anne Bullen'. The anglicization of Anne's name is one example of the writers' diplomacy, exacerbating the 'Englishness' of Henry's future wife and Elizabeth's mother. The character of Anne herself is provided with only two scenes in which she has a verbal presence. She first appears as a guest at a banquet hosted by Cardinal Wolsey in Act One scene four,. Initially, Anne's only lines are in response to the flirtatious banter of Lord Sandys, who actually attempts to kiss Anne during their exchange. However, shortly before they are interrupted, Anne engages in more provocative banter with Lord Sandys:

ANNE: You are a merry gamester,

My Lord Sandys.

SANDYS: Yes, if I make my play.

Here's to your ladyship; and pledge it, madam,

For 'tis to such a thing –

ANNE: You cannot show me. (*Henry VIII*, I.4.45-8)

Her final line here demonstrates two things: firstly, that she has sufficient spirit and confidence to interrupt a male courtier and even chide him; secondly, that she grasps the sexual connotations of the word 'thing' remarkably quickly and is able to make a somewhat flirtatious response. Of course, the manner in which Anne speaks this line is open to the interpretation of the performer, and it could certainly be delivered with the prudish shock of a properly chaste maiden. However, it is possible that Anne delivers this rejoinder with the flirtatious tone which often accompanies courtly speech. This is the last thing she says in the entire scene, leaving the impression of a woman capable of flirtation and perhaps, by extension, un-chastity. Her subsequent dancing with the King could serve to reinforce this image or undermine it, so it is not until the second act that the spectator is allowed a fuller glimpse into Anne Bullen's psyche.

Act Two scene three is the only scene of semi-private contemplation afforded Anne as she considers the impending trial of Henry's marriage. Alone with an 'Old Lady', Anne pontificates on the justice of Katherine's trial, bemoaning the misery awaiting an undoubtedly good woman and the perils of high position:

after this process,

To give her the avaunt, it is a pity

Would move a monster. (II.3.9-11)

The Old Lady is similarly sympathetic toward Katherine's plight, especially noting the vulnerability that Katherine faces now that '[s]he's a stranger [...] again' (II.3.17). However, the atmosphere of the scene alters when Anne declares 'By my troth and maidenhead, / I would not be a queen' (II.3.23-4). Firstly, as noted by Rory Loughnane, the word 'queen' is suggestive: 'Anne's insistence upon the use of the indefinite article actually serves to amplify the sexual connotation with its homophonic other – quean'.²⁴⁷ From this moment, Anne implicitly links the position of Queen with prostitution, indicating an awareness that to seek the position of Henry's Queen would require the exploitation of her sexuality. It also dissolves the strict division between the legitimacy of a queen and the supposed illegitimacy of a 'royal mistress', or 'quean', building upon similar puns used in earlier plays like *The True Tragedie of Richard III* which highlighted the usurpation of the Queen's role by Shore's Wife. This comment inspires the following response from the Old Lady:

Beshrew me, I would,

And venture maidenhead for't; and so would you,

For all this spice of your hypocrisy.

(II.3.24-6)

²⁴⁷ Rory Loughnane, '“I myself would for Caernarfonshire”: The Old Lady in King Henry VIII', in *Celtic Shakespeare: The Bard and the Borderers*, ed. by Willy Maley and Rory Loughnane (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), pp. 185-202 (p. 195).

protestations, as when this messenger conveys the King's offer to make her the Marchioness of Pembroke with an accompanying annual pay of one thousand pounds, Anne does not refuse:

Vouchsafe to speak my thanks and my obedience,

As from a blushing handmaid, to his highness;

Whose health and royalty I pray for. (II.3.71-73)

The Old Lady is proven correct in her assertions: Anne is a hypocrite. Despite her earlier denials, she accepts advancement at the hands of her married monarch. Cloaked in conventional piety, Anne's response includes the revealing word 'handmaid', a word that in a biblical context could be used to denote a married man's concubine. Its inclusion signifies at the very least an unconscious awareness on Anne's behalf of what is expected of her and the potential anomaly of her position. Nevertheless, it is the Old Lady's teasing references to Anne's earlier denials that illustrates the reversal of the younger woman's moral stance, alluding to

a lady once – 'tis an old story -

That would not be a queen, that would she not,

For all the mud in Egypt. Have you heard it? (II.3.90-2)

Anne can only reprove her companion for her humour, not offer an effective denial.

What is illustrated most effectively in this particular scene is the strategy of displacement utilised by the playwrights in their representation of Anne Bullen. Throughout the dialogue between the two women, all bawdy connotations of the

King's behaviour and Anne's potential advancement through his lust are ostensibly displaced onto the Old Lady. It is she who expresses the ambition that Anne seems to conceal and it is she who embodies the sexual voraciousness that could so easily be attributed to Anne as Henry's 'mistress' in the modern sense. Consequently, the memory of Anne is protected from specific allegations of sexual immorality, but she is not entirely removed from its shadow either. She fails to end the conversation, and she undermines much of her credibility when she accepts the advancement that she had repeatedly (hypothetically) refused. Loughnane comes to a similar conclusion, remarking upon the playwrights' 'uneven portrayal of Anne' and the way in which this portrayal 'mirrors the historically ambivalent place that Anne occupied in the late Tudor and Stuart mindset' (*Celtic Shakespeare*, p. 202). This 'uneven portrayal' is exacerbated by the playwrights' decision to evoke particular theatrical memories amongst audience members. This scene in *Henry VIII* is attributed to Shakespeare, and it consciously evokes a conversation in Shakespeare's *Othello*; it is therefore worth briefly considering this earlier Shakespeare scene because the playwrights evidently intended the regulars in the audience of the King's Men to recognise the parallels between the two scenes. Their primary purpose was to provide the audience with a key to interpreting and perceiving Anne by comparing her to her parallel in *Othello*: Desdemona.

In Act Four scene three of *Othello*, the innocent young wife asks if other married women are capable of infidelity, prompting her worldly married companion to confirm that such women do exist. In language the later play revisits, Desdemona asks Emilia 'Wouldst thou do such a deed *for all the world*?'

(IV.3.67), to which Emilia responds in the affirmative.²⁴⁹ In *Henry VIII*, Anne echoes the earlier play when she declares ‘I would not be a queen / *For all the world*’ (II.3.45-6). Both scenes also use variations of the phrase ‘by my troth’: Desdemona says ‘Good troth’ (*Othello*, IV.3.69), as does Anne when she resists the Old Lady’s claims about her ‘soft cheverel conscience’ (*Henry VIII*, II.3.33); their respective attendants respond with ‘By my troth’ (*Othello*, IV.3.70) and ‘troth and troth’ (*Henry VIII*, II.3.34). There is also a shared use of ‘Beshrew me’ in both plays, used by Desdemona when she, like Anne, lends weight to her denials by threatening her own destruction should she forswear herself: ‘Beshrew me, if I would do such a wrong / For all the world!’ (IV.3.77-8). The Old Lady in the later play utilises the same phrase in such a manner that her words could almost be a response to Desdemona’s claim: ‘Beshrew me, I would’ (II.3.24). Emilia, meanwhile, expresses herself more practically than Desdemona, asserting that the material gains are worth the slip in chastity:

By my troth, I think I should, an undo’t when I had done. Marry, I would not do such a thing for [...] any petty exhibition. But for all the whole world? ud’s pity, who would not make her husband a cuckold to make him a monarch? I should venture purgatory for’t (IV.3.70-6).

The Old Lady similarly employs the word ‘venture’ when discussing attractions of becoming a queen, noting that she would ‘venture maidenhead for’t’ (II.3.25). Emilia may be less bawdy than the Old Lady, but she patently shares the other woman’s ambition as well as her language.

²⁴⁹ William Shakespeare, *Othello*, The Arden Shakespeare Third Series, ed. by E. A. J. Honigmann (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2004).

I contend that the verbal, visual, and conceptual similarities between these two scenes from the Shakespeare canon were intended, and that Shakespeare and Fletcher intended to evoke memories of this scene in *Henry VIII* in order to highlight the complexities of Anne's character as compared to Desdemona. The principal difference between these two characters is in their behaviour, not their words: Desdemona will deny committing (or wanting to commit) adultery, and the events of the play support the veracity of her denials; Anne will deny aspiring to greater social position, but before the scene finishes she has accepted elevation from the clearly-besotted monarch. By evoking the memory of Desdemona in this scene, the playwrights undermine Anne Bullen's credibility through a negative comparison with the chaste, virtuous Desdemona.

However, this is not the only area of comparison worth consideration, for these women share a common fate: death at the hands of the husband. Anne's death may not be depicted onstage as is that of Desdemona, but an audience must have been struck by the similarity between the two women's executions as a consequence of suspected adultery. Desdemona is patently innocent of any crime, as the play makes clear when it reaches its deadly conclusion; Anne, however, is a different case. *Henry VIII* ends before the culmination of Anne's life, concluding instead with the moment of her triumphant delivery of England's Protestant hope. The audience would have been aware of Anne's ignominious execution, mired in scandal and accusations of adultery that could and will not be satisfactorily explained away in the same manner as Emilia does for Desdemona. Shakespeare and Fletcher therefore provide their audience with the key to interpreting their Anne through the stylistic similarities between Desdemona's scene with Emilia and Anne's scene with the Old Lady. Desdemona's obvious innocence in the face

of Othello's accusations will encourage an audience likewise to perceive Anne Bullen as another victim of a tyrannical husband's passions.

I argued above that the comparison drawn between Desdemona and Anne in two similarly framed scenes highlights the ambiguity in the playwrights' portrayal of Anne; namely, that she may appear hypocritical in her behaviour but still prove a victim of her husband. Such ambiguity recurs throughout the play, but remarkably it does not focus principally on Anne Bullen; rather, the centre of ambiguity is Henry. The playwrights are keen to emphasize Henry's sexual and moral culpability for what transpires in the course of his marriage(s), encouraging an audience to identify him as the locus of controversy. Where they might have attributed blame to Anne for the destruction of a loving marriage and of former favourites, the writers displace this blame onto a man – and not just any man, but the King. To demonstrate this I will now direct my attention to the playwrights' depiction of Henry VIII within the eponymous play, and the keyword to my interpretation of his character is the 'conscience'.

In his 1596 work *A discourse of conscience*, William Perkins observes the following about man's conscience:

If he [man] do any thing amisse, he [God] sets his conscience first of all to tell him of it [secretly]: if then he amende, God forgives it: if not, then afterward conscience must openly accuse him for it at the barre of Gods iudgement before all the saints and angels in heauen.²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰ William Perkins, *A discourse of conscience* (Cambridge: 1596), pp. 9-10/A5^r-A6^v.

The voice of one's conscience is therefore one to be heeded, for this 'temporary iudgement that is giuen by the conscience is nothing els but a be|ginning or a [forerunner] of the last iudgement' (Perkins, p. 10/A6^v). The significance of man's conscience only increased with the Reformation, with evangelicals encouraging man to explore his personal relationship with God and not rely on priests as intercessors in his communication with the Almighty. Without the clergy to listen, judge and punish sinful behaviour, one came to rely upon one's conscience, the infallible internal judge that provides man with spiritual guidance. Consequently, when Shakespeare and Fletcher's Henry claims that his conscience has inspired the investigation into his marriage it is no small matter.

In Act Two of *Henry VIII*, the King declares that his conscience is troubled by his marriage; specifically, his marriage to his late brother's wife which has angered God and resulted in no (male) children for the cursed couple. While this should be a matter of grave spiritual concern, few other characters believe or respect Henry's claims and instead suggest that his 'conscience' is affected more by venal concerns than his spiritual well-being. One notable exchange occurs in Act Two scene two between the Lord Chamberlain and two dukes:

CHAMBERLIAN: It seems the marriage with his brother's wife

Has crept too near his conscience.

SUFFOLK: No, his conscience

Has crept too near another lady. (II.2.15-17)

These are the words of a character who is both friend and brother-in-law to the afflicted monarch, and consequently the Duke of Suffolk's cynical interpretation

of Henry's 'misgivings' cannot be easily dismissed. His cynicism is accentuated by the structuring of this scene and its immediate successor, for this scene concludes with the King's lament over his stricken conscience:

[...] O my lord,

Would it not grieve an able man to leave

So sweet a bedfellow? But conscience, conscience -

O, 'tis a tender place, and I must leave her (II.3.139-42).

Although Henry is keen to convey the integrity of the proceedings against his marriage, he nevertheless unwittingly alludes to the lustful urges that (at least partially) underpin his actions through his use of the words 'bedfellow' and 'tender'. More significantly, the playwrights immediately follow this with the entrance of Anne in scene three declaring 'Not for that neither', an apparent dismissal of earlier topics of conversation with the Old Lady that may nonetheless be interpreted as a response to Henry's speech - and one that does not reflect well on the monarch.

Despite the frequency with which the word 'conscience' appears in this play, it seems that few characters believe Henry when he claims that his conscience inspired his break with Katherine; his apparently pious concerns about his spiritual condition are frequently undermined by both his own behaviour and the comments of other characters. As demonstrated above, the language of conscience is frequently rendered sexual. Even during the trial of his marriage itself, Henry's description of his conscience is patently sexual. He notes how his 'conscience first received a tenderness, / Scruple and prick' (II.4.167-8) when the

French ambassador questioned the legitimacy of his daughter Mary, and how the ‘respite’ required to allay French concerns instead troubled Henry:

[...] This respite shook

The bosom of my conscience, entered,

Yea, with a spitting power, and made to tremble

The region of my breast (II.4.167-181).

Despite all his claims to the contrary, no one in the play or audience is convinced that Henry is inspired by much beyond simple lust for Anne. Even when others attempt to praise their King and his choice of new bride, they cannot resist attributing Henry’s actions to his desire rather than the moral urgings of conscience:

2 GENTLEMAN: Our King has all the Indies in his arms,

And more, and richer, when he strains that lady.

I cannot blame his conscience. (IV.1.45-7)

As a consequence of such comments, Henry’s integrity in seeking the dissolution of his marriage is consistently undermined and the character of Henry himself is laid open to condemnation in a way that Anne, as an interested party but not a prime mover in the marriage trial, is not.

In addition to this, the playwrights are keen to delineate Henry’s faults in other regards. Gerard Wegemer makes a compelling case for Henry’s fundamental corruption, demonstrated specifically through his (mis)use of the legal system. His authority over the supposedly impartial proceedings of the marriage trial is indicated in the first few lines of Act Two scene four:

WOLSEY: Whilst our commission from Rome is read,

Let silence be commanded.

KING: What's the need?

It hath already publicly been read,

And on all sides th'authority allowed;

You may then spare that time.

WOLSEY: Be't so. Proceed. (II.4.1-5).

The King is patently exerting his influence over the court, and his references to the key political actors of the divorce are tellingly possessive. In Act Two scene two, for instance, Wolsey is addressed as 'My good Lord Cardinal', 'my Wolsey', and more worryingly, 'The quiet of my wounded conscience' (II.2.72-3). He is identified as the 'cure fit for a king' (74), further emphasising the political loyalty that Wolsey owes his king; obviously, such partiality to one of the interested parties in the marriage should not be present in the man soon to convene the trial into said marriage. After Henry becomes disillusioned with the 'dilatory sloth and tricks of Rome' (II.4.234), he longs for the return of his 'learned and well-beloved servant, Cranmer' (235) – the man who will eventually dissolve his marriage to Katherine.

Moreover, Henry clearly articulates to Cranmer the extent to which he is willing to manipulate the legal system to his own benefit. This occurs in Act Five scene one, during which he warns his servant that he is about to undergo examination at the hands of his Catholic enemies. He reassures the archbishop that he need not overly fear his impending trial: 'Thy truth and thy integrity is rooted / In us, thy friend' (V.1.114-5). This King has little interest in allowing any

legal proceeding to occur without himself controlling its outcome and its participants. Dismissing Cranmer's virtuous dependence on his 'truth and honesty' as naïve, Henry promises that '[t]hey shall no more prevail than we give way to.' (5.1.143). This is a pivotal moment, for if one accepts the veracity of this claim, then no one in the play who suffers does so without the King's direct will; consequently, the playwrights signify that Henry is to blame for the misery that could so easily be attributed to Anne.

This subtle condemnation of Henry VIII as the primary source of upset in the play is emphasised by the writers' use of the alternative title 'All is true'; as Wegemer notes, this phrase appears in only one other Shakespearean play – *The Winter's Tale*, featuring the mistakenly-jealous and tyrannical King Leontes who tries and convicts his wife of adultery. In Act Two scene one of this play, Leontes accuses Hermione of much the same crimes as Anne Boleyn herself would someday face from her husband, after which he declares 'All's true that is mistrusted'.²⁵¹ As with the parallel drawn between Anne and Desdemona, a comparison of Henry and Leontes suggests that Henry's actions towards the wives he puts on trial are unjust, and his own manipulation of the court is accentuated. Wegemer further comments on the verbal allusion to *The Winter Tale* in *Henry VIII*, observing that the former was

a play performed just a year or two before, a play that depicts a powerful monarch who throws away the most worthy of queens on the basis of his "conscience." [...] Caught in his passion, however, Leonatus [sic] brings about

²⁵¹ Gerard Wegemer, 'Henry VIII on Trial: Confronting Malice and Conscience in Shakespeare's *All is True*', *Renaissance*, 52 (2000), pp. 111-126 (p. 126).

death and grave harm to those around him. Yet *A Winter's Tale* stops short of suggesting malice, primarily it seems, because Leonatus does not know himself, but once he does, he willingly repents [...] The many instances of wilful action [...] and the repeated suggestion of malicious action, suggest that Henry is like Leonatus in his tyranny, but unlike him in his reformation' (p. 126).

This allusion to another Shakespeare play accentuates the moral disparity between the two kings: in comparison to Leontes, Henry's stirrings of 'conscience' appear disingenuous and self-serving.

I have shown in this section that when confronted with the challenge of portraying a woman who could so easily be vilified as the royal 'whore', the playwrights practice a policy of diplomatic displacement: they created an anonymous Old Lady to embody the sexuality and ambition that Anne cannot, while quietly indicting Henry as the prime mover in their affair and the consequent desire for an annulment from Katherine. The dramatists thus exonerate Anne Boleyn (embodied in 'Anne Bullen') from any social or real crime; however, this process of negotiation leaves the audience with only a vague understanding of Anne herself. As neither villain nor victim, Anne remains ambiguous and little more than a vague presence in the play – essentially effaced from the story of her own rise.

b) Conflating the Queens

Another area in which Shakespeare and Fletcher provide an evasive portrayal of the 'royal mistress' is through her ostensibly unlikely juxtaposition and conflation with her dramatic foil: the discarded wife. The wife character in each play is representative of Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first and longest-

serving spouse. I will show that although it may be simple to dichotomise the two women, the playwrights instead focus on their similarities. In doing so, they conflate the Anne Boleyn-surrogate with the Catherine of Aragon-surrogate, preventing the former from establishing herself as an individual character with the unique qualities so frequently recorded of Anne Boleyn. Frye argues a similar point when she explores the connection between the three queens in *Henry VIII*: ‘In singling out the three Tudor queens, Katherine, Anne Bullen, and Elizabeth, who failed to produce a male heir, the play creates a need to consider the alternative forms of reproduction available to a king’ (Frye, p. 189). Her work echoes some early modern accounts of Anne Boleyn, in particular John Aylmer’s *An Harborovve for faithfull and trevve subiectes* (1559) – which praises all three Queens - and William Slatyer’s 1621 poem – which focuses on the role of Henry’s first three wives as mothers. Frye conflates her three Queens along maternal lines, specifically their failure to produce a male heir; I will argue that the primary conflation occurs along the lines of religious affiliation, with the character representative of Catherine often exhibiting the reformist – or proto-Protestant – qualities which were and are an essential component of Anne Boleyn in the cultural memory, as evidenced in the non-dramatic accounts explored above. The conflation thus effects another form of effacement of Anne within her own life story.

In her essay ‘Mariological Memory in *The Winter’s Tale* and *Henry VIII*’, Ruth Vanita makes the following point:

The under-dramatization of Anne has been read variously as evidence of Shakespeare’s patriarchal bias, as compelled by his fear of censorship, and as necessary in order to focus sympathy on Katherine. Most commentators betray

an inclination to read Katherine and Anne as contrasted figures, saint versus sinner or rebel versus romantic sex object. In history, as Shakespeare's audience well knew, the fates of Katherine and Anne were more similar than different.²⁵²

She reflects here the critical interest in Shakespeare and Fletcher's depiction of Katherine, arguably the most sympathetic and compelling character of *Henry VIII* whose early death in Act Four seems to rob the play of its emotional centre. In the straightest retelling of the King's 'Great matter', *Henry VIII* features a Katherine of immense dramatic power, eclipsing not only Anne Bullen but, when necessary, also the eponymous King himself. Many earlier critics have commented on Katherine's theatrical presence, and Kim H. Noling makes this point most effectively:

Shakespeare gives Katherine the theatrical wherewithal to resist Henry's desire to "turn [her] into nothing" [...] Anne Bullen is, in contrast, so circumscribed by her staging that she cannot fairly compete for the audience's acceptance of her as an adequate substitute for the bold Katherine. Such dramaturgy shows Shakespeare working against Henry's immediate objective of supplanting Queen Katherine with Queen Anne (Noling, p. 298).

What, then, is the predominant impression made by the character of Katherine on the audience that is not matched by the under-dramatized Anne? More than anything else, Katherine conforms to the accepted pattern of feminine virtue in queens.

²⁵² Ruth Vanita, 'Mariological Memory in *The Winter's Tale* and *Henry VIII*', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* (2000), pp. 311-337 (p. 328).

Praised throughout the play as a pious, exemplary wife and consort, Katherine is described as a 'good Queen' (II.1.157) by the second gentleman and '[s]o good a lady' (II.3.3) by Anne, while Henry himself remarks that no man has '[a] better wife' (II.4.132) and further identifies her as 'the queen of earthly queens' (138). Katherine emerges most strongly as an effective Queen Consort when she intercedes with the King in defence of those resisting a crippling tax enforced – supposedly – by Wolsey:

KATHERINE: Nay, we must longer kneel. I am a suitor.

KING: Arise, and take place by us.

Half your suit

Never name to us. You have half our power;

The other moiety ere you ask is given.

Repeat your will and take it. (II.2.9-13)

In an echo of medieval 'queenship', Katherine embraces the privilege of her position which allows her to intercede on behalf of her husband's subjects. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the intercessory role traditionally belonged to the Queen and was a responsibility embraced and practiced with renowned success by Edward III's Queen Philippa of Hainault who knelt for the lives of the Calais burghers in 1347. Joined as one flesh with her royal husband, a queen was often expected to temper the monarch's masculine reason and judgement with feminine gentleness and mercy. In this one moment, Katherine reveals herself a merciful and effective Queen Consort. It is telling that Anne Bullen is never depicted interceding for another; she never usurps the role of the Queen Consort or influences Henry in any particular way. This differentiates her from Shore's

Wife, Bianca and Evadne, all of whom seized the prerogatives of others at court. This suggests Shakespeare and Fletcher's determination to develop traditional methods of representing the 'ruler's mistress', creating a more nuanced understanding of the early modern 'mistress' in her modern meaning that is evasive and ambivalent.

The next time Katherine is compelled to kneel to her husband, she is less successful. As Henry grows weary of the 'dilatatory sloth and tricks of Rome' (II.4.234), Katherine's reliance on papal judgement grows less significant and allows for the 'spleeny Lutheran' (III.2.99) Anne's accession. I have made reference here to the doctrinal differences between the romantic rivals, for this is one of the areas in which these women are juxtaposed – as evidenced by various chronicle accounts keen to emphasise disparity in religion. However, this is the area in which the unlikely conflation of the two women occurs.

Despite the fact that she lived and died (to all intents and purposes) a Catholic, Anne Boleyn's sympathy with reformers during her brief ascendancy allied her in the early modern imagination with the Protestant faith – an alliance that was solidified once her daughter began her reign as the first Protestant Queen Regnant. As noted in the various historical chronicles above, Anne was accepted as one of the principal catalysts for the Reformation, with Foxe going as far as to identify her as a Protestant martyr. Catherine of Aragon, meanwhile, was remembered as a staunch Roman Catholic, a woman who only recognised the authority of the Pope in judging the validity of her marriage (an act that was actually governed by political considerations as well as religious). As the daughter of the 'Catholic monarchs' Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon, and the mother of the maligned Catholic Queen Mary Tudor, Catherine was

perceived by an early modern audience as fundamentally papist. The religious persuasions of Anne and Catherine were and are key elements of their historical representation, and thus one may anticipate this to be a touchstone whereby the queens are differentiated in a dramatic work such as *Henry VIII*. However, the playwrights manipulate these traditional expectations throughout the course of the play, attributing to Katherine reformist tendencies that should - according to public perception - belong to Anne. In doing so, Shakespeare and Fletcher deprive Anne of this mark of difference between her and Katherine, instead conflating the two Queens and thus effacing the under-dramatized Anne.

Act Three scene one depicts Katherine's meeting with Wolsey and Cardinal Campeius, during which she expresses some less than orthodox opinions:

O, good my lord, no Latin.

I am not such a truant since my coming,

As not to know the language I have lived in.

A strange tongue makes my cause more strange, suspicious.

Pray speak in English (III.1.42-46).

Some scholars have recognized this speech as Katherine's effort to present herself as an Englishwoman, not the foreign queen who could be more easily reviled and rejected. I, however, argue that the playwrights are addressing Katherine's religious identity. By beginning her protest with reference to Latin as an unnecessary religious tool and concluding it by mentioning the absolving of sin, Katherine (and thus the playwrights) raise the question of Catholic orthodoxy; specifically, in suggesting that this traditionally Catholic practice be performed in

English, Katherine is allying herself with the reformers – the sect most closely associated with Anne. Moreover, the visual symbolism of an English queen refusing to ‘confess’, as it were, in Latin to two Cardinals, is powerfully suggestive of Katherine’s resistance to traditional Catholic practices.

Katherine’s seeming religious unorthodoxy, however, reaches its fulfilment in her death scene, during which she experiences a vision:

Enter, solemnly tripping one after another, six Personages, clad in white robes, wearing on their heads garlands of bays, and golden vizards on their faces, branches of bays or palm in their hands. [...] the first two hold a spare garland over her head, at which the other four make reverend curtsies (IV.2.82.1-8).

This vision is related by Katherine to her companions:

Saw you not even now a blessed troop
Invite me to a banquet, whose bright faces
Cast thousand beams upon me, like the sun?
They promis’d me eternal happiness
And brought me garlands (IV.2.87-91)

This death-bed vision bears distinct similarities to reported visions experienced by two other prominent royal women. As identified by Gordon McMullan in his edition of *Henry VIII*, these two women were Marguerite of Angoulême, the queen of Navarre, and Anne Boleyn herself.²⁵³ The former, sister of Henry VIII’s

²⁵³ Gordon McMullan, ‘Introduction’, in *Henry VIII* by William Shakespeare, ed. by Gordon McMullan (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2000) pp. 1-190 (p. 133).

nemesis Francis I, is mentioned in the play by Wolsey as a potential second bride for the King, and her reputation had certainly spread across the channel as a literate royal woman who was identified as an early defender of Protestants; John Calvin himself sought protection at Marguerite's court, among other heretics troubled by the religious turmoil in France.²⁵⁴ Both her reformist leanings and her French background should ally her with the reformist and Francophile Anne Boleyn, a woman who is often erroneously believed to have been in Marguerite's service during her early court career. However, as E.E. Duncan-Jones pointed out as early as 1961, Marguerite's much reported death-bed vision is evoked in Katherine's own: 'a very beautiful woman holding in her hand a coronet which she showed her and told her that soon she would be crowned'.²⁵⁵ The iconic headgear and the promise of a glorious future is pivotal to both visions, and the seeming bestowal of spiritual crowns is suggestive of martyrdom.

Another source from which the playwrights probably took inspiration is Holinshed's 1586 edition of his *Chronicle*, in which he relates a tale from 'Anglorum praelia' regarding a prophetic dream supposedly had by Anne: 'this good quéene was forwarned of hir death in a dreame, wherein *Morpheus* the god of sléepe (in the likenesse of hir grandfather) appéered vnto hir'.²⁵⁶ This vision bears fewer explicit similarities to Katherine's vision than did Marguerite's, but it

²⁵⁴ Barbara Stephenson, *The Power and Patronage of Marguerite de Navarre* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), p. 175.

²⁵⁵ Quoted in 'Introduction' of *Henry VIII*, ed. by McMullan, p. 133.

²⁵⁶ Raphael Holinshed, *The Third volume of Chronicles* (London: 1586), p. 940.

does indicate that there was an established pattern within historical narratives of death-bed visions experienced by royal reformist women. The playwrights make the connection between Anne's vision in Holinshed's *Chronicles* and Katherine's in the play more explicit in Act Three scene one, when Katherine privately listens to a song about Orpheus, a mythological figure with the ability to lull others into a trance-like stupor – thus not dissimilar in key ways to *Morpheus*, the god of sleep. Anne's vision does not focus on her own personal spiritual glory, as do those of Marguerite and Katherine, but rather on her glorious legacy, that of Elizabeth and the Reformation. Again, a queen is comforted shortly before her death by a promise of future exaltation. Katherine's vision in this play thus belongs to a tradition of primarily reformist, if not Protestant, prophetic dreams.

In their portrayal of Katherine, Shakespeare and Fletcher break with a tradition that to this day still recognizes Catherine of Aragon as, first and foremost, a devout Roman Catholic. Admittedly there are numerous indicators that Katherine is a Catholic queen within the play, not least of which is her continued reliance on papal adjudication with regards to her marriage: 'I do refuse you for my judge; and here / Before you all, appeal unto the Pope' (II.4.116-7). However, Shakespeare and Fletcher resist a simplistic polarization of Katherine as the Catholic wife and Anne as the Protestant 'sexual mistress'. Instead, they complicate their characterisation of Katherine and attribute several reformist qualities to the Catholic wife that are traditionally associated with Anne. Earlier I referred to Katherine's resistance to corrupt cardinals and Catholic methods of obfuscation in Act Three scene one, and it is this resistance, combined with the death-bed vision and its literary exemplars, that identifies Katherine as an unacknowledged reformer. Amy Appleford expands on this notion, commenting

on the elements of martyrology in *Henry VIII*: ‘in her dying vision, Katherine is given a noble send-off by powers that lie outside and beyond those of her former husband, receiving tokens, not of disgrace and defeat, but of victory through martyrdom’.²⁵⁷ Appleford’s essay contends that the playwrights depict Katherine as a proponent of reform within the Catholic faith, symptomatic of the ‘Catholization of the Reformation’ that responded to the strident Protestant voices in the theatrical community at the time. I, however, argue that by juxtaposing Katherine with Anne Bullen, the playwrights allow an audience to recognize in Katherine the very qualities so often extolled by Anne’s partisans.

History presents Anne as the Queen who urges religious reform and suffers a martyr’s death; in *Henry VIII*, it is Katherine who is presented this way. Consequently, the doctrinal distinction between Katherine and Anne fades away and, to quote McMullan, ‘the two queens seem to lose their distinct symbolic significance’.²⁵⁸ This conflation of the two women in matters of religion deprives Anne of her continued cultural prominence as a proto-Protestant, effacing her as a principal participant in England’s break from Rome. Instead, several key facets of her cultural identity are absorbed into the character of Katherine, diminishing Anne while enriching the portrayal of her supposed rival.

To summarise, in *Henry VIII* Anne Boleyn is not villainised as a corrupting force nor the illegitimate enemy of a legitimate wife. Rather, the playwrights displace her potential villainy onto the ruler, thus highlighting the ruler’s

²⁵⁷ Amy Appleford, ‘Shakespeare’s Katherine of Aragon: Last Medieval Queen, First Recusant Martyr’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 40 (2010), pp. 149-172 (p. 151).

²⁵⁸ Gordon McMullan, ‘Introduction’, in *Henry VIII*, by William Shakespeare, pp. 1-199 (p. 135).

incompetence or corruption and transforming the ‘sexual mistress’ into yet another subject abused by the royal will. Although Shakespeare and Fletcher are understandably tactful in their portrayal of Henry VIII, the King is not immune to cynical constructions of his much-lauded ‘conscience’ both within the play (the Duke of Suffolk) and without (Wegemer), while his abuse of the legal system exacerbates concerns over his moral rectitude. This subtle vilification of the King complements the conflation that occurs with the interested female parties, a representational strategy that rejects the interpretations of various partisan historians that have frequently cast Catherine and Anne as antagonists. Whereas many literary texts framed their narrative around a juxtaposition of the two women, *Henry VIII* accentuates their similarities, serving to highlight their shared experience as a king’s paramour at the expense of highlighting the distinguishing characteristics of each woman. A comparable process occurs in *The Queen and Concubine*, with Brome evidently adopting similar tactics to those employed both by chroniclers and by Shakespeare and Fletcher in his play, to which I will now direct my attention.

4. *The Queen and Concubine*

a) Displacing Blame

The story of Anne Boleyn’s life and death is retold in the later play *The Queen and Concubine* by Richard Brome, a text that delineates the rise of King Gonzago’s ‘sexual mistress’ Alynda at the expense of his saintly wife Eulalia. The latter is subjected to a public trial for adultery with the popular general Sforza, Alynda’s own father, before being banished to the country. In her edition of *The Queen and Concubine*, Lucy Munro discusses the similarity between

Eulalia and two of Shakespeare's 'neglected queens': *The Winter Tale's* Hermione and, more importantly for my analysis, *Henry VIII's* Katherine. She notes that both Shakespeare plays were revived between 1628-34, a period in which 'Brome had worked closely with the King's Men' and as such it is 'unsurprising to find that these plays exert a strong influence on his writing' (Munro, paragraph 4). The theatrical resonances of Shakespeare's work in *The Queen and Concubine* further encourage the identification of Eulalia as a reworking of *Henry VIII's* Katherine and thus the historical Catherine. The similarities between Eulalia's narrative and that of Catherine of Aragon include their shared public repudiation and humiliation during an unfair trial, as well as the popular support for the former Queen and her child in the face of royal disapproval. This comparison between two wronged wives inevitably leads to the identification of Alynda as the representative of Anne Boleyn, the ambitious 'mistress' in its modern meaning who overthrows the previous Queen, accedes to her place, and who is eventually removed from her position through the whim of the King.

Another element that encourages identification of Alynda with Anne Boleyn is her designation as 'Concubine' in the title, as it was this very title that the Spanish Ambassador Eustace Chapuys frequently utilised when referring to Anne in his formal dispatches. This term, as I established in my introduction, is not strictly appropriate: the role of the concubine in the early modern imagination was as a de facto wife, a domestic companion who was an alternative to a wife for those who could not or chose not to wed. King Gonzago already had a domestic companion (Eulalia) in the form of a legitimate wife. By challenging this partnership Alynda could not be a 'concubine' *per se*, a fact exacerbated by her

eventual marriage to Gonzago for if she were already a de facto wife then she would have no need to upset the kingdom to become a literal one. Most importantly, Alynda identifies herself as a ‘mistress’ in the play as I will demonstrate later in this chapter, revealing that the modern meaning of the term had reached a level of acceptance among early modern audiences who could correctly identify a ‘sexual mistress’ rather than a courtly lover or benign concubine. The portrayal of Alynda in Brome’s play is an evident expansion of the source material, a tale in Robert Greene’s *Penelope’s Web* which features, as Catherine M. Shaw observes, a ‘two-dimensional’ portrayal of Olynda as ‘nothing more than a strumpet who seduces the King’.²⁵⁹ I will briefly analyse Brome’s depiction of Alynda as a seemingly stereotypical ‘royal mistress’, possessing the ambition and ruthlessness that would seem to frame her as the play’s villain. However, I will then show how Brome resists this impulse and instead displaces the blame onto two male characters: Flavello, the royal pander, and King Gonzago.

Alynda is initially recruited as a potential ‘ruler’s mistress’ by the courtier Flavello. Flavello crows of ‘[t]he pains [he] took to fit her to [Gonzago’s] appetite’ (1.3), and certainly Alynda does seem to have taken note of the advantages that being a ‘royal mistress’ brings. Scene three consists largely of a quarrel between Alynda and her outraged father Sforza, during which they counter opposing interpretations of the ‘royal mistress’ role:

SFORZA: Is it such dignity to be a whore?

²⁵⁹ Catherine M. Shaw, *Richard Brome* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), p. 101.

ALINDA: Pray sir, take heed: kings' mistresses must not

Be called so (I.3).

Significantly, Alynda identifies herself as the King's 'mistress', which in this context clearly denotes a 'mistress' in its modern meaning. The modern meaning of 'mistress' was now sufficiently familiar to a theatrical audience that a character can use it without clarifying the term as 'wanton' rather than 'courtly'. The eavesdropping Gonzago is impressed by Alynda's speech, revealing in an aside: 'That word makes thee a queen'. Again, here is the familiar wordplay on the differing meaning of quean/queen, similarly exploited by the Old Lady in *Henry VIII*, accentuating the link between sexual favours and power as well as undercutting the previously rigid demarcation between the supposed illegitimacy of the 'sexual mistress's' position and the legitimacy of a queen's. Alynda perceives this position as an honour, one which will confer considerable advantages upon her, not least the power to challenge the repressive authority of her father; where he would criticise and silence her, she asserts her right to speak. These subtle warnings that her father may not wish to hinder her courtly ascent indicate Alynda's imminent acceptance of the role of 'royal mistress'. She is evidently ambitious for the power that should come with seducing the monarch, much like Evadne in *The Maid's Tragedy*. This ambition is further indicated as she continues to caution her father against offending one who may soon achieve even greater influence:

Suppose I were advanced so far above you

To be your queen, would you be therefore desperate,

And fall from what you are to nothing? (I.3)

Unlike the other characters within the play, Alynda is already anticipating the possibility of marriage with her royal lover. It is not, however, until a later scene that an audience is made aware of the extent of Alynda's ambition.

Alinda's first soliloquy conveys her thoughts and plans regarding her royal dalliance rather than merely reacting to her father's interrogation. This speech is a tour de force of amoral aspiration:

My power upon the weakness of the King
(Whose raging dotage to obtain my love,
Like a devouring flame, seeks to consume
All interposed lets) hath laid a groundwork
So sure upon those ruins, that the power
Of Fate shall not control or stop my building
Up to the top of sovereignty (I.5).

This soliloquy underpins Martin Butler's description of Alynda as 'ambition incarnate'.²⁶⁰ Brome thus presents the audience with an unsympathetic character, one who thirsts for power but who feels no true affection for the man who will provide it. This impression is confirmed as the play proceeds, revealing Alynda as a shrewd manipulator of the King as she seeks supremacy over her romantic and dynastic rival:

O, rather, let me think your lustful purpose

²⁶⁰ Martin Butler, *Theatre and Crisis 1632-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 35.

Was but to rob me of my virgin honour,
And that you put her by but for a time
Until my youth had quenched your appetite,
Then to recall her home to your embraces.
She is your wife it seems then, still, not I.

Alynda's lament is intended to harden the King's heart against his former family, a form of emotional manipulation at which Anne Boleyn was reportedly adept. Although Alynda initially appears mildly sympathetic toward Eulalia and Sforza, she nonetheless perceives them as 'those necessary steps / By which [she] must ascend to [her] ambition', and she is not averse to requesting the deaths of both Eulalia and her son. With some justification, several characters comment on Alynda's culpability for the upheaval experienced by the country. For instance, the courtier Lodovico comments bitterly on Alynda's rise and its effect on the commonweal:

The pride, the cruelty, the ambition
Of that wild fury, the outrageous queen
Who treads and tramples down the government. (II.2)

However, Brome repeatedly undermines this assessment of Alynda, as I will now demonstrate through an exploration of other characters in the play.

Before becoming the 'King's mistress', Alynda is favoured by Eulalia for her 'simple country innocence' (I.1). This changes after she is exposed to Flavello, evidently the King's favoured procurer of 'royal mistresses'. In a clandestine interview with the King, Flavello alludes to '[t]he pains I took to fit

her to your appetite' (I.3), describing how he 'plied her then with pills that puffed her up / To an high longing' (I.3). He later facilitates her ascent to the throne by traducing Eulalia and manipulating the legal proceedings against her:

ALYNDA: Appear the proofs manifest?

FLAVELLO: That was my care; it behoved me to work

The witnesses (I.5).

He suborns one set of witnesses against Sforza for '[f]ive hundred crowns a piece' (I.5), and corrupts two more in the Queen's service: 'These were the Queen's own people, and deserved / A thousand crowns apiece' (I.5). Flavello is pleased to receive favour from Alynda once she has wed the King and Alynda even promises her 'minion' the award of '[a]n earldom' (III.2). Despite Brome's progressive efforts to undercut lingering perceptions of the 'ruler's mistress' as a fundamentally illegitimate role in opposition to the legitimate position of queen, the characterisation of Flavello demonstrates that this demarcation had not entirely disappeared. There is an obvious shift in power dynamics once Alynda becomes Queen as Flavello adopts a subservient attitude toward her, one that he did not evince when she was a powerful 'sexual mistress'. Basely fawning toward his 'bounteous goddess', Flavello is persuaded to arrange the death of Eulalia so as to maintain the favour of his erstwhile protégé: 'I must not lose her though, this hand then soon / Must do the work, be't not already done' (III.3). Evidently, this ambitious councillor or favourite turned obsequious petitioner is inclined to perceive a substantial difference between Alynda the 'Queen' and Alynda the 'quean'.

This characterisation of Flavello reveals something significant: despite the confidence with which Brome wields the term ‘mistress’ in its modern definition, the playwright is still engaged in the process of transforming the meaning of the ‘mistress’ onstage, as evidenced by his representation here of the role of ‘mistress’ as inherently illegitimate and in opposition to the legitimate wife – at least as viewed by Flavello. This, however, will be challenged later in the play in much the same way as it is in *Henry VIII*: namely, through the portrayal of the wife character or Catherine-surrogate. The clearest conclusion that can be drawn from this evidence is that while the ‘modern mistress’ is being gradually established performatively, playwrights like Brome were still engaged in the process of transforming the meaning of the ‘mistress’ on stage.

Flavello is obviously the catalyst for Alynda’s rise, inspiring her ambition and conspiring to maintain her tenuous grasp on power. However, prior to Alinda’s arrival at court, Flavello has already acted as a procurer of women for his King; Brome thus indicates that this particular courtier is fundamentally corrupt without the added complication of Alynda. Moreover, by introducing Flavello as both courtier and royal pimp, Brome highlights the King’s own immorality as both man and monarch, not only failing to chastise his servant but encouraging his illicit activities. The play therefore presents the audience with two other villains: Flavello, the catalyst for Alynda’s sexual and social misdeeds, and the King. Brome is keen to establish the King’s culpability for the injustices that transpire throughout the course of the play. In doing so, the potential narrative of sexual manipulation and female villainy is displaced by that of a ruler’s incompetence.

The degree to which the King is convinced by the accusations against Eulalia is debatable, and certainly could be a ripe area of dramatic interpretation. Matthew Steggle compares Gonzago to Shakespeare's Leontes and concludes that like his Shakespearean counterpart, Gonzago 'conceives an irrational jealousy concerning his queen, whom he suspects of having an affair'.²⁶¹ I, however, contend that his continuing support of his son as his heir suggests that he is not persuaded by these accusations of infidelity – if he were convinced that Eulalia was unfaithful then he would not trust the paternity of his son. Other plays which feature public accusations of infidelity immediately address the question of legitimacy. For instance, in Thomas Middleton's *Hengist, King of Kent*, Queen Castiza is compelled to protest the legitimacy of her and Vortiger's son when her husband publicly denounces her as unchaste, a move that is not required of Eulalia. The King in Brome's play is only concerned that he maintains the loyalty of his son, urging him to 'come from that woman' and to '[p]ut [her] forth' (2.1). He expresses doubt about paternity only when he discovers that his son has disobeyed his express command not to visit Sforza, and rejects him only after he is already reported dead: 'I ask / How died that bastard boy, no son of mine' (IV.3). Even so, the King swiftly relents after listening to the account of the boy's 'last words': 'This boy yet might be mine, / Though Sforza might have wronged me by the by' (IV.3). Such equivocation is unconvincing, to say the least.

What emerges from these scenes is a portrait of an angry, rejected father whose declared belief that his son is a bastard does not ring true, as he did not

²⁶¹ Matthew Steggle, *Richard Brome: Place and Politics on the Caroline Stage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 85.

doubt his paternity when he ‘discovered’ his wife’s infidelity; only when he feels that his son questions his behaviour does the King choose to repudiate him as son and heir. This interpretation is emphasized by the King’s conditional acknowledgement of his son after his supposed death, an acknowledgement that also suggests that his belief in Eulalia’s adultery is wavering at the very least. Brome therefore constructs the scene to give the audience a sense that the King never genuinely believed that Eulalia had committed infidelity with Sforza, else he would have immediately addressed the problem of his doubtful son. If one accepts this interpretation of the King’s credulity, then his character is tarnished by the patent self-interest of Eulalia’s trial. At least Leontes was truly convinced that he had been betrayed by his spouse; King Gonzago publicly humiliates his wife as a means to an end – the end being Alynda.

The King’s motivation for his divorce is questioned by Lodovico in much the same way as Suffolk questions Henry’s ‘conscience’ in *Henry VIII*. Probably inspired by the earlier King’s Men play, Brome uses the courtier character to convey the undercurrent of unease within the play-world over the King’s actions. When elucidating his reasons for separating from Eulalia, the King refers to the ‘proofs’ (II.1) which alone compelled him to reject her, to which Lodovico rightly responds ‘Royal hypocrisy’ (II.1). Lucy Munro also observes this similarity between the two plays, noting that ‘[l]ike Henry VIII, the King presents himself as torn between his love for his wife and higher motives [...] In both cases, however, the audience rightly suspect that the king is casting off his post-menopausal wife in favour of a younger alternative’ (Munro, para. 45). Brome’s King similarly abuses parliamentary procedure for his own ends. He is keen to

receive the assent of his courtiers in his separation from Eulalia, provoking a telling response from the honest Lodovico:

KING: Do ye all approve it?

ALL: We do.

LODOVICO: [*Aside*] We must (II.1).

The King makes all his servants complicit in the legal process by reminding them of their ‘consent’ in the dissolution of his old marriage, and requiring further ‘consent’ in the creation of his new one:

I am by law no less than your consent

Divorced and free from all impediment

To make my second choice in marriage (II.1).

Having intimidated his courtiers into assenting to his divorce, Gonzago now employs threats to quash any incipient resistance to his will. Once this has been achieved, he comments with some satisfaction: ‘Kings were / But common men, did not their power get fear’ (II.1). He thus acknowledges and approves of the fear which encourages his courtiers to acquiesce to his will. Lodovico clarifies this behaviour immediately in the next scene as ‘oppression, tyranny indeed’ (II.2).

I explored the connection between a monarch’s sexual abandon and his inability to rule effectively in Chapter Two, and this link is addressed again in *The Queen and Concubine*; as Butler notes, ‘[t]he king’s adultery is an immediately familiar emblem for the defilement of the purity of the state and the abdication of responsible government’ (Butler, p. 41). Although Brome presents both Flavello

and Gonzago as cankers in the heart of the body politic, it is clear that Flavello's role at court is the result of Gonzago's poor rule. Throughout the course of the play, Brome accentuates the weakness of this King and his failure to rule competently primarily through the dominance of Alynda, who declares him her 'subject' and gives him explicit orders: 'If thou be'st King, thou yet art but that King / That owes me love and life, and so my subject' (IV.3). Alynda has evidently usurped the prerogatives of the King, demonstrating that Gonzago's sexual immorality encourages corruption within the body politic and his own emasculation at the hands of his new Queen – all hallmarks of the ineffective and tyrannical ruler. The playwright patently holds the King responsible for the political upheaval in his realm, and this is most evident in the changes he makes to the source text; whereas in Robert Greene's narrative a happy ending is achieved through the expulsion of Olynda, this play has the King share her social banishment. Brome thus identifies both King and 'sexual mistress' as cankers at the heart of the state that must be purged so as to regain social equilibrium, thus displacing much of the opprobrium that could be applied to Alynda as the ambitious 'mistress' in its modern meaning onto the King as tyrannical ruler. Gonzago is not the victim of female villainy, but rather a perpetrator of his own.

b) Conflating the Queens

As a surrogate for Catherine of Aragon, Eulalia suffers similar indignities as her historical *Doppelgänger*. A dutiful foreign wife of the reigning King, she is rejected after her lady in waiting seduces the monarch and determines to wed him rather than merely remain a 'sexual mistress'. Banished from court and deprived of her child, Eulalia nevertheless retains the love of the people and is revered for her devotion to good works. I discussed earlier some of the similarities between

The Queen and Concubine and what Munro identified as the ‘neglected queen’ plays, but I will highlight one further point of comparison between these texts: like her counterpart in *Henry VIII*, Eulalia kneels before her husband during her trial: ‘*EULALIA in back, crowned, a golden wand in her hand, led between two FRIARS. She kneels to the KING; he rejects her with his hand*’ (II.1). This brief dumb-show evokes Katherine’s trial in *Henry VIII*, featuring yet another Queen who kneels before her husband as he attempts to dissolve their marriage. The absence of speech here serves both to exacerbate the power of this particular gesture – as an act not requiring words – and to undermine it – for would not her appeal be more effective had she the rhetorical skills of Katherine? Like her dramatic predecessor, Eulalia’s appeal is unsuccessful, and she ultimately submits to her fate with seeming good will:

My thanks unto you all that do obey

So well with one consent your sovereign lord,

And, sacred sir, thus low, as it becomes me,

Let your poor handmaid beg that you incline

A patient ear to my last petition (II.1).

The word ‘handmaid’ is an interesting one for Eulalia to choose; it indicates not only her subservience to her King, but also an acceptance of her new anomalous social and sexual position. It signifies that Eulalia has been transformed from a rightful wife to the king’s now-unwanted sexual partner. Moreover, she accepts this change in an effort to be more agreeable to her monarch. This is evidence of a subtle conflation of Eulalia and Alynda: as the ‘mistress’ in its modern meaning, Alynda

should bear the title of handmaid. Alynda may have displaced Eulalia as royal wife, but Eulalia has responded by usurping the position of extra-marital sexual conquest.

It is during the summation of the trial that the conflation of the two women becomes most apparent, with Brome presenting Eulalia's trial as more representative of Anne Boleyn's trial than that of Catherine of Aragon. During his address to the court, Gonzago protests his affection and trust in his spouse in a manner reminiscent of Henry VIII in Shakespeare and Fletcher's Blackfriars scene:

For such I held her, and so many years
Retained her in the closet of my heart,
Its self-companion, that till these proofs,
Which now like daggers by compulsive wounds
Have made their passages, she could ne'er have parted (II.1).

Adopting a similar stance to Henry, Gonzago protests his satisfaction with his bride but feels compelled to repudiate her due to 'religion' or 'justice' (II.1) (essentially conscience). This resemblance to Katherine's trial, however, is swiftly dispelled when the accusation of adultery is made explicit before the court, with Gonzago employing Horatio in much the same manner as Henry does Wolsey when he urges him to 'speak [...] for me' (II.1). The accusation of adultery was faced by Anne Boleyn during her trial, an accusation that many chroniclers felt she had answered well but which did not prevent her condemnation. Brome accentuates the commonalities between Anne's trial and Eulalia's by adding further charges against Eulalia that were once, and have been since, levelled against Anne herself: 'And that she sought the life of fair Alinda / By sword and poison both' (II.1). During her lifetime and since, Anne Boleyn faced accusations of attempting to poison her

queenly rival, an accusation never directed toward Catherine despite similar temptations. Moreover, the suspicious Alynda suspects her predecessor of attempting to ‘enchant’ the King’s son and turn him ‘[t]raitor’ (II.1), thus raising the spectre of Anne’s own posthumous reputation as a witch. Eulalia might kneel like Catherine but she is charged like Anne, a conflation that is exacerbated by the King’s next observation:

Our laws of Sicily are so well rebated

With clemency, and mercy, that in this case

They cut not life from one of royal blood,

Only take off (as is on her performed)

All dignities, all titles, all possessions (II.1).

Eulalia is protected from the ultimate penalty reserved for adulterous, and thus treasonous, royal wives by her high birth. Her ‘royal blood’ (II.1) protects her from further legal reprisals, much as Catherine of Aragon was protected by her erstwhile status as Princess of Spain. Anne Boleyn, notably, did not have such protection. Presenting Eulalia as an accused adulteress, like Anne Boleyn, but also as a woman of ‘royal blood’, like Catherine, Brome further conflates the two women. This conflation effaces the Anne-surrogate rather than the Catherine-surrogate because the former never receives her own trial; she is thus the more reduced by this conflation than the woman who actually has the opportunity to address the charges against her. The woman who occupies the social and cultural space of the ‘modern mistress’ is effaced by the wife through the playwrights’ decision to conflate the trials.

Richard Brome's decision to conflate Catherine and Anne's respective trials allows for an interesting analysis of cultural perception, for although Alynda is identified by several characters as the 'King's mistress', the displacement of her crimes (and those of Anne) onto Eulalia during her trial means that Eulalia now displaces Alynda as the sexual offender. Banished from the court, Eulalia is left to seek a meagre living in the country with, as her former servant Rugio notes, no outside aid allowed her: 'Thou mayst not serve her; that will be brought within compass of relief and then thou mayst be hanged for her' (II.3). If, then, Eulalia has absorbed the role of convicted adulteress, what of Alynda? By marrying the king, Alynda completes the process begun through the conflation of the two trials, namely the rewriting of her sexual past. Even when she loses the King's protection, she is condemned not for her sexual immorality but for ambition and cruelty. For instance, the King eventually repudiates Alynda because of her 'excess and pride' (V.2), while her wronged father warily accepts her repentance as long as she does not 'rise / With an ambitious thought of what she was' (V.4). Brome thus negotiates the cultural memory of Anne Boleyn through his strategies of displacement, with Eulalia (temporarily) burdened with the title of adulteress, a title that should belong to Alynda and, by extension, Anne Boleyn. Anne's sexual behaviour is a significant component of her narrative and her memory, and by effacing the cultural recognition of promiscuity in his Anne-surrogate, Brome partially effaces Anne.

One other significant area of conflation in *The Queen and Concubine* is a familiar one: religion. This is most clearly presented when Eulalia is condemned by ignorant countrymen for her supposed sexual misbehaviour, her conduct blamed for the blight that has afflicted her dowry-land:

We are advised by our divines and augers,

[...]

They find by divination that this punishment

Is fall'n upon this province by the sin

Of the adulterous Queen whose dowry 'twas (III.1).

Eulalia is eventually able to convince them otherwise, and in the process she reveals a less than respectful attitude toward Catholic practices. As the representative surrogate for Catherine of Aragon, Eulalia could confidently be expected to embody the former's exemplary Catholicism. In many respects Eulalia conforms to this idea, as noted by Matthew Steggle:

In some sense, Eulalia is clearly presented as a 'saint', and indeed, Kaufmann describes the play as a 'hagiography'. She performs miracles, in the form of healing the sick by laying on of hands, and she is preserved from assassination by a second miracle [...] Such an obviously Catholic frame of reference might imply a Catholic framework for the play as a whole (Steggles, p. 89).

Her character's divine gifts, in addition to her general narrative arc, encourage comparison with accounts of saints' lives, with saints themselves being very much a feature of Catholic worship. However, Brome complicates this depiction by having Eulalia herself resist explicit identification with Catholicism. The discarded Queen proves dismissive of certain Catholic practices, most notably when confronted with the countrymen who blame her for their misery on the instruction of 'divines and augers':

Priests are but apes to kings, and prostitute

Religion to their ends. Might you not judge

As well, it was th'injustice and the wrongs

The innocent Queen hath suffered (III.1).

Not only does Eulalia criticise the worldliness and sycophancy of politicised priests, a common complaint among Protestants when observing Catholic church government, she encourages Pedro and his followers to interpret matters for themselves – much as evangelicals urged Christians to read and interpret Biblical scriptures for themselves rather than rely on ‘divines’. Thus already associated with Protestant religious practices, Eulalia’s later warning that one should ‘[b]eware idolatry, and only send / All praise to th’ power whose mercy hath no end’ (III.1) merely continues to reflect contemporary Protestant criticism of Catholic worship. As Steggle also observes, Eulalia herself refuses the title of ‘saint’ (Steggles, p. 90), although she was perfectly willing to accept the more degrading title of ‘handmaid’. Brome, like Shakespeare and Fletcher, subtly aligns his Catherine-surrogate with Protestantism and in so doing he undermines the doctrinal differences that distinguish Catherine of Aragon from Anne Boleyn in the cultural imagination. Anne Boleyn’s proto-Protestantism was an essential component of her cultural memory as recorded by writers like Foxe. Any depiction of Anne onstage may be expected to incorporate such a religious identity into the character, but Brome instead attributes such Protestant behaviour to the Catherine-figure in *The Queen and Concubine*. Again, the second wife is robbed of her identity as the champion for Protestant reform when it is bestowed upon her romantic rival, thus further effacing her in the narrative of her own rise and fall.

The Queen and Concubine initially appears to follow the pattern of representation in the prior chapter, with Alynda exulting in her power in much the

same manner as Shore's Wife, Evadne and Domitia while also identifying the emasculating weakness in the King. However, Brome complicates this portrayal in a similar manner to *Henry VIII*, adding nuance to the understanding of a particular 'ruler's mistress' by refusing to let her be unambiguously vilified. Gonzago shares moral responsibility for the corruption of an erstwhile country innocent with a villainous advisor, and the ruler's dismissal of his wife again occurs through the abuse of his authority. Brome also conflates the King's two sexual partners along doctrinal lines while simultaneously robbing his Anne Boleyn-surrogate of her dubious reputation as an accused adulteress. Two prominent aspects of Anne Boleyn's characterisation in the narrative of her life - namely her faith and her trial for adultery - are therefore displaced onto her supposed foil. As a consequence, the Anne-figure is effaced from the account of her rise and fall.

To summarise, I have demonstrated that *Henry VIII* and *The Queen and Concubine* share several common features, the most significant of which in this section is their depiction of a ruler who rejects a virtuous wife in favour of another woman. This coveted woman, in the course of her amorous career, enjoys a period as a 'mistress' in its modern meaning, and consequently acquires the taint of sexual immorality and is morally condemned forthwith. In becoming a royal paramour, the 'sexual mistress'-cum-second-wife occupies the damning position of a female councillor whose political control is primarily sexual, and she eventually replaces a supposedly legitimate wife in the royal household. Tradition thus dictates that she be the villain of any drama that engages with these themes. However, none of the playwrights under discussion in this chapter conforms to this convention, instead directing an audience's critical gaze toward the men

responsible for the sexual corruption and social elevation of these women. As representatives of Anne Boleyn, these 'royal mistresses' may engage in less than reputable activities, but they are consistently presented more sympathetically than their royal lover, frequently shading into the territory of royal victim. The playwrights negotiate the portrayal of Anne Boleyn by displacing her potential villainy onto the ruler, thus highlighting the ruler's incompetence or corruption and transforming the 'sexual mistress' into yet another subject abused by the royal will.

However, the 'sexual mistress' is not the only victim. This role is shared by the 'mistress's' romantic rival – an unlikely conflation that further undermines any attempted vilification of the woman who occupies the role of 'mistress' in its modern meaning as an antagonist to or usurper of the role of the wife. The depictions of Katherine and Eulalia undermine the religious differences frequently utilised to juxtapose Anne Boleyn (and her surrogates) and Catherine (and her surrogates). Both Anne and Alynda could be identified as the doctrinal opponents of the wife and a sexual malefactor; by (correctly or falsely) attributing these characteristics to Katherine and Eulalia, the dramatists reveal how simplistic such binaries are. It undermines the crude characterisation of Anne as the opponent of Catherine, or the 'sexual mistress' as the opponent of the wife. Instead, their experiences are now shared to a large degree, giving the role of 'mistress' in its modern meaning a gloss of legitimacy that a simplistic formulation of the 'sexual mistress' as an illegitimate usurper of a wife's prerogatives does not; Anne Boleyn is the vehicle through which this is achieved, the familiar figure whose own illegitimate position underwent transformation and who could not be dismissed. Shakespeare, Fletcher and Brome all emphasise this final point

specifically through the representation of legacy in their respective plays, and it is to this topic that I will now direct my attention.

5. Displacing Anne Boleyn with her Progeny

One other consistent feature of Anne Boleyn's narrative included in historical accounts is mention of her legacy – more often than not embodied in the figure of Elizabeth. As the mother of the Virgin Queen and a contributor to England's supposed emancipation from the Roman Catholic Church, Anne Boleyn's life as narrated by historians is coloured by this largely positive legacy, and the glorified reign of England's first Protestant Queen Regnant meant that Anne Boleyn could never be entirely forgotten. She could, however, be displaced and effaced. I will demonstrate that the playwrights under discussion in this chapter use different tactics when addressing this problem of legacy in representing Anne Boleyn, with *Henry VIII* actively displacing Anne with her daughter in the final scenes and *The Queen and Concubine* engaging in a process of dramatic effacement. They employ these tactics as a means with which to evade representing Anne Boleyn, but they nevertheless acknowledge the impossibility in entirely displacing or effacing this figure in the cultural memory. Consequently there is a complex negotiation between evading the figure of Anne Boleyn when discussing her legacy - whether embodied in Elizabeth or through the social/political influence she had on various events – and recognising her as an essential figure in the world of the play. In *Henry VIII* Shakespeare and Fletcher omit the Queen in their final scene, displacing her with her daughter in an effort to avoid addressing the controversy that will soon engulf and destroy Anne. At the same time, however, the dramatists remind the playgoers of her continued existence offstage. In *The Queen and Concubine* I will show how

Brome negotiates his portrayal of the Anne-surrogate by having her marriage and position verbally denied by the King, but then adapts his source material so that the King and his former lover perform an act that implicitly re-affirms their union and hence acknowledges the Anne-figure.

a) *Henry VIII*

The difficulty confronting Shakespeare and Fletcher is how they will conclude their play, which purports to portray Henry VIII's 'Great Matter', without lighting the tinderbox that was the failure of Henry to conceive a son with his supposed 'true' wife and his eventual termination of this hard-fought-for marriage. Once Elizabeth is born Anne Bullen disappears from the stage and her unhappy fate is of course not staged nor is it explicitly acknowledged throughout the course of the play. The playwrights manage this by concluding the play with an elaborate ceremony in which the glorious Protestant reign of Anne's progeny is prophesied. Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury and future Protestant martyr, dominates the final scene depicting Elizabeth's christening during which he experiences and relates a vision of her future as Queen:

This royal infant – heaven still move about her! –

Though in her cradle, yet now promises

Upon this land a thousand thousand blessings (V.4.17-9).

He continues with specific reference to her religious innovations and the benefits that will issue forth from such changes:

Truth shall nurse her,

Holy and heavenly thoughts still counsel her.

[...]

God shall be truly known (V.4.28-36).

The emphasis on ‘truth’ and its cognates aligns Elizabeth with particularly Protestant notions of worship, emphasising her future as the supposed bastion of religious enlightenment in England. Cranmer concludes his speech with a nod to James I, employing the familiar imagery of the Phoenix much associated with the Virgin Queen as a means to acknowledge the Scottish king’s continuation of Elizabeth’s legacy. As Henry declares his satisfaction in his new offspring, the scene avoids confronting the controversies that will engulf its surviving participants; in particular, by gazing ahead to the future of the child offered before the audience’s gaze, the playwrights displace the absent mother and her unhappy fate with her daughter. Through this displacement, the dramatists evade portraying Anne and therefore avoid the controversy that plagues the rest of her tenure as Queen, wife and mother.

However, although Shakespeare and Fletcher could effectively eradicate Anne Boleyn from their final scene by focusing on her daughter, they choose to remind the audience of the absent figure from the family tableau and therefore undermine their strategy of evasion. This is a negotiation that acknowledges Anne and encourages the audience to remember her, yet simultaneously allows the playwrights to avoid confronting unpalatable facets of her history and character directly. I disagree with Noling’s assertion that ‘Anne’s eclipse is total’ (Noling, p. 304) at the conclusion of the play, for although the narrative may require her literal and figurative absence in order to achieve a happy ending, the playwrights refuse to efface her entirely. This is because the legacy of the ‘sexual mistress’ cannot be entirely excised. Both Susan Frye and William Leahy comment on a

similarly ambivalent treatment of Anne in the pageant mentioned at the beginning of this chapter: ‘the staging of Anne Boleyn, coupled with her verbal absence, demonstrates an enormous discomfort with having to include her representation at all. Boleyn is, in a sense, excluded in the same moment she is included’ (Leahy, p. 138).²⁶² *Henry VIII* inverts this compromise, with the absence of Anne Bullen in the final scene undermined by the playwrights’ linguistic efforts to evoke Anne and the controversies that will continue to surround her, most notably in Cranmer’s speech. Before he launches into his vision, he pointedly praises *both* parents:

And to your royal Grace and the good Queen,

My noble partners and myself thus pray

All comfort, joy, in this most gracious lady (V.4.4-6).

Thus he acknowledges Anne in absentia, a dramatically potent moment that prevents the audience from ignoring Anne’s own participation in the miracle that is Elizabeth. A more subtle and troubling allusion to Anne occurs when Cranmer states that ‘Truth shall nurse [Elizabeth]’. This comment certainly indicates that someone other than her mother will provide Elizabeth with emotional, intellectual, and religious sustenance. In words that ostensibly praise Elizabeth’s future as the Protestant saviour of England, Shakespeare and Fletcher subtly remind the audience of an event in the nearer future that will be altogether less pleasant for Elizabeth.

²⁶² See Susan Frye, *Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 33.

Interestingly enough, the other character in this scene who prevents Anne Boleyn from being entirely effaced is Henry. In the final words proper of *Henry VIII*, the eponymous character instructs those attending to visit his recently-delivered wife: 'Lead the way, lords, / Ye must all see the Queen' (V.4.71-2). The characters, and the audience, are left with the penultimate demand *not* to forget or neglect Anne Boleyn. Specifically, Henry asks the audience to remember the 'Queen', not his wife. It is worth noting that the dissolution of Anne and Henry's relationship involved unique legal manoeuvrings that had her deny the very existence of her marriage – achieved through the process of annulment – but not the title of Queen. She died as Queen Consort without having ever married the King. The play's reference to her as 'Queen' rather than wife is thus particularly appropriate. Furthermore, the audience is not encouraged to remember her as a wife, the supposedly legitimate role that she came to occupy; instead the playwrights embrace the ambivalence of her position and remind the audience that she was a 'royal mistress'.

The last moments of the play are further complicated by Henry's earlier comment that 'never, before / This happy child, did I get any thing'. This could only resurrect the memory of young Mary Tudor, the future Catholic Queen Regnant whose reign would provide an unhappy counterpart to Elizabeth's own, and who earlier only really received mention in Katherine's death-bed speech: 'In which I have commended to his goodness / The model of our chaste loves, his young daughter' (IV.2.131-2). This final request to Henry is ignored in his concluding speech of the play, acknowledging only Elizabeth as his child. However, what the King's words achieve is precisely the opposite, reminding the audience of Katherine's compelling presence and her desire that her daughter be

remembered by her father. This casts a shadow on the vision of triumphant Protestantism that so dominates the final scene, indicating that Cranmer's prophecy is simplistic in its presentation of England's harmonious religious and political future; indeed, the mention of Mary should be especially troubling for a clairvoyant Cranmer considering that she will order his death. Maybe the playwrights intended the audience to utilize their powers of hindsight and recognize not only Cranmer's vulnerability as evoked by Henry's words, but Anne Boleyn's too from the same source – Henry. Regardless, these allusions subtly subvert the image of dramatic and religious unity presented in the play's conclusion, thus preventing the total effacement of the missing Anne. This 'sexual mistress' can no longer be excised from society with ease like Shore's Wife or Evadne.

b) *The Queen and Concubine*

At the end of *The Queen and Concubine*, the deposed Queen is re-established and she is expected to rule alongside the rightful heir to the throne, thus seemingly effacing the reign of Alynda. When the King acknowledges Eulalia as his 'lawful' wife, Alynda is deprived of her identity as Queen; when the King abdicates and retires to a religious institution, Alynda is deprived of her identity as 'mistress' in its modern meaning. Her entire narrative is effaced while Eulalia's narrative is provided with the happy conclusion that was denied her historical counterpart – namely, an acknowledgement of her position and integrity, a return to power, the happy accession of her child, and freedom from the husband who betrayed her. The character of Alynda has only one recourse left to her, to enter

the Magdalene nunnery at Lucera,

To spend this life in tears for my amiss

And holy prayers for eternal bliss (V.4).

A quiet withdrawal to a religious community was suggested to Catherine of Aragon, a peaceful solution to Henry's 'great matter' that was summarily dismissed by the stubborn Queen. By requesting this, the Anne-surrogate Alynda incorporates herself within the Catherine narrative, seemingly effacing the cultural memory of Anne in the process.

When Eulalia resumes her 'rightful' role as Queen and Gonzago's legitimate wife, Alynda the Anne-surrogate is seemingly effaced. However, Brome undermines this neat conclusion when he elaborates on the King's intended plans. Alynda's decision to retire to 'the Magdalene nunnery' evokes the following response from Gonzago:

She has anticipated my great purpose,

For on the reconciliation of this difference

I vowed my after-life unto the monastery

Of holy Augustinians at Solanto. (V.4)

In this moment, Brome complicates his dramatic resolution in a comparable manner to *Henry VIII*. Whereas the earlier play undermined Anne's effacement through her Protestant legacy (embodied in Elizabeth) by making pointed references to both the mother's and the notoriously Catholic Mary Tudor's continued existence, *The Queen and Concubine* settles on resurrecting the

ambiguity surrounding the marital status of both Eulalia and Alynda - an area of controversy that similarly plagued their historical counterparts.

Considering that *The Queen and Concubine* ends with Gonzago determining which of his two wives is the 'lawful' one, the spectre of marital and thus dynastic illegitimacy shadows much of what transpires onstage. The King's eventual choice of Eulalia legitimizes their union and thus the right of the latter to rule alongside their child. However, Brome subverts this neat conclusion when he has both the King and Alynda simultaneously withdraw to religious institutions, indicating that the two former lovers are engaging in a spiritual union that is suggestive of marriage. Munro's introduction to her edition of the play touches briefly on this idea: 'Rather than ending with the betrothals common in pastoral, therefore, the conclusion of *The Queen and Concubine* feature a 'divorce' between the King's body natural and his politic, a divorce facilitated by yet another 'marriage', this time to a religious vocation' (Munro, para. 72). With this not-uncommon notion that the religious vocation comprises a form of marriage, it is telling that Brome has his former lovers simultaneously retreat from public life to the haven of specifically Catholic institutions; in contrast, Eulalia – with more than a touch of Protestant hagiography about her – remains in public life as a mother, not wife, of a king. Gonzago and Alynda are seemingly united at this point in their religious affiliation and their decision to retire from public life, and although the King may identify Eulalia as his lawful wife earlier in Act Five, she is nonetheless deprived of this status by her husband's social exit. Consequently, the legitimacy of Eulalia's status as 'wife' and thus mother of the legitimate heir is subverted by the spiritual marriage of Gonzago and Alynda. This marital ambivalence is evocative of Anne Boleyn's own effect upon a royal marriage, and

by rejecting the neat conclusion preferred by his source text, Brome refuses to allow Alynda, and thus Anne, to be effaced.

As I have demonstrated above, these plays both utilize various strategies of displacement and effacement with which to represent Anne Boleyn, generally avoiding explicitly establishing who or what she was. There is, however, an acknowledgement of this evasive process in the conclusion of each play, when the surviving characters and thus the playwright(s) indicate how they will memorialise the controversial Anne-characters in their work. Shakespeare and Fletcher skilfully nod to Anne's religious legacy by displacing her with her daughter, the future Protestant Queen inheriting the convictions of her 'Lutheran' mother; meanwhile, Brome apparently resorts to the convenient expedient of expelling the malign influence from society, immuring her in a suitably Catholic institution and allowing for the re-ascension of the pseudo-Protestant former queen. Nevertheless, each play is marked by a degree of ambivalence and self-consciousness regarding this process of effacement. *Henry VIII* subtly reminds the audience of Anne's continued, awkward existence offstage, while *The Queen and Concubine*'s seeming expulsion of the Anne-representative is complicated and mitigated both by her desire for religious retirement and by the attendant withdrawal of the monarch. This later play arguably makes explicit what remains implicit in the earlier works: it is impossible entirely to efface Anne.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have approached the portrayal of Anne Boleyn in *Henry VIII* and *The Queen and Concubine* as a case study, a demonstration of how dramatists depict a particular woman who would be retroactively identified as a 'mistress' in their work and how they use their portrayal of her to develop the

representational strategies already in use for ‘royal mistresses’ onstage. I have demonstrated in earlier chapters that dramatists had a dramatic strategy for representing ‘royal mistresses’ that involved the usurpation of others’ roles or prerogatives; such techniques would be inappropriate for a portrayal of Anne Boleyn, however, as her cultural significance required deft handling. Her presence in historical records and thus the early modern cultural imagination had undergone significant alteration - the woman who had once been characterised as a treasonous adulteress had transformed into the martyred mother of England’s Protestant saviour within a matter of decades. Therefore, the playwrights who selected to represent this controversial figure did so utilising specific strategies employed by historians and chroniclers over the years. These strategies enabled Shakespeare and Fletcher to portray Anne explicitly in the character of Anne Bullen and Brome to evoke her life in *The Queen and Concubine* through his adaption of the source text and his characterisation of the leading players in the drama that unfurls. However, these playwrights are compelled by historical and political conditions to be circumspect in their portrayal of Anne Boleyn. Consequently, the dramatists employed the tactics of displacement, conflation and effacement in their efforts to negotiate the presence of Anne Boleyn on the early modern stage, tactics used in service of the over-arching strategy of evasion.

This strategy may seem a disservice to the historical personage, but the resulting portrayals of Anne Bullen and Alynda are more nuanced than those employed in *The True Tragedy of Richard the Third*, *The Maid’s Tragedy* and *The Roman Actor*. These Anne-surrogates are not represented as illegitimate usurpers of others’ prerogatives; rather, the playwrights evince an ambivalence about these ‘mistresses’ in the modern meaning and – in particular – their

legitimacy. By vilifying other (male) characters and conflating the Anne-figure with the wife, the dramatists may provide an evasive portrayal but it is one that avoids characterising the 'sexual mistress' as fundamentally illegitimate. The acknowledgement in both plays of her ineffaceable legacy means that despite the evasive strategy, the character is not erased nor delegitimized.

In this chapter I have alluded to the various trials of the characters, trials in which the women are obliged to defend their sexual behaviour either prior to or during marriage. These trials are a forum in which a woman's sexual and thus social identity may be debated, and consequently the function of trials in early modern 'mistress' plays are worthy of further attention. In my next chapter I will explore the explicit negotiation of women's social identities in the courtroom, focusing on how a woman who occupies the social and cultural space of the 'mistress' is often compelled to resist male attempts to impose an erroneous sexual identity upon her.

CHAPTER FOUR

Mistresses on Trial: Resistance to Inadequate Social

Categorisation

‘You speak a language that I understand not. / My life stands in the level of your dreams’ (*The Winter’s Tale*, III.2.78-9).²⁶³ Queen Hermione declares this when her husband’s irrational jealousy results in her trial, and her sentiments could easily be articulated by *Henry VIII*’s Katherine and *The Queen and Concubine*’s Eulalia; all three women learn, to their detriment, that they are vulnerable to the efforts of their husbands to ‘define’ them in a judicial court setting. This is not unique to wives: all early modern women may be subjected to male social and sexual categorisation in ideological state apparatuses, the court being one of the most prominent and one in which its participants are obliged to perform for an audience – whether consisting of a jury, a magistrate, or the general public. The necessity for performance, however, invites inevitable comparison between the courtroom and the theatre, the latter of which was equally engaged in the process of establishing a specific female identity performatively. It is therefore inevitable that early modern dramatists would seize the opportunity to represent women who occupy the cultural and social space of the ‘mistress’ in her emerging modern meaning on trial, an arena in which the ventriloquised female voice may engage in the performative process of creation by resisting specific sexual and thus social categorisation by self-interested patriarchal authorities. As the modern understanding of ‘mistress’ was being

²⁶³ William Shakespeare, *The Winter’s Tale*, The Oxford Shakespeare, ed. by Stephen Orgel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

created performatively, the playwrights used trial scenes to signify the necessity for the early modern public to recognise this evolving meaning lest other terms such a 'whore' continue to be utilised erroneously and ideologically.

In this chapter I will explore representations of women on trial in greater detail, establishing how a courtroom could provide an arena in which female social classification may be asserted and resisted. I will begin by illustrating the connection between the theatre and the courtroom, both of which depend upon an audience's participation, before examining early modern church courts in particular. As one of the principal public enforcers of sexual and marital discipline in early modern England, it is this arena of legal arbitration with which the average Jacobean audience member would be most familiar and thus it is evoked in theatrical representations of specific women on trial. I will illustrate how the playwrights framed the trials of certain women in John Webster's *The White Devil* and John Fletcher and Philip Massinger's *The Spanish Curate* as consistent with early modern church court trials, as well as demonstrating that the dramatists intended to evoke notorious English trials in their portrayals of Vittoria's trial and that of Henrique's marriage.

The female characters I discuss in this chapter either do occupy the cultural and social space of the 'mistress' in her modern meaning or they could; however, they are rarely if ever identified as 'mistresses'. Instead, they are identified otherwise by male authorities at their convenience. The dramatists intentionally set their work in an English context, I argue, so that the audience may recognise the various female characters' resistance to sexual categorisation imposed by male authorities as indicative of similar efforts in the early modern community and thereby relevant to their own experience. Trial scenes offered a

useful setting in which sexual categorisation and its limitations are publically discussed and determined by patriarchal authorities, thus mirroring the ongoing creation of the sexual category of ‘modern mistress’ on the early modern stage.

1. Understanding Performance and Spectatorship

Trial scenes, as I will show, encourage the audience’s recognition of the uneven power structures that force women into sexual or social categories that are most convenient to the patriarchal authorities. I will demonstrate this by drawing upon critical research about the phenomenology of spectatorship to show the similarities between female performance at trial and theatrical performances. A central figure in this field is Bruce R. Smith; he notes ‘how *essentially* social identity was identified with speech’ and how ‘it is a bid for power’.²⁶⁴ Speech’s power in liturgy to persuade is obvious, but the stage allows an audience to hear from a variety of voices from various social backgrounds – a unique opportunity for the majority of attendees of public playhouses. Multiple speakers can lead to ‘a competition or mastery over that field – and hence over the listeners’ subjectivity’ (Smith, p. 276). He also makes the compelling point that the soliloquy has the power to infiltrate the mind of the listener, so much so that it may seem to be their own interior voice.

This potential power of the theatre can be subject to failure, however, as Jeremy Lopez makes clear, and this potential formed part of the playgoing experience. He builds on Jonathan Dollimore’s contention that early modern

²⁶⁴ Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 258.

tragedy rejects the aesthetic urge to ‘order’ variant elements, applying the same principle to comedy.²⁶⁵ He explores space, both literally and metaphorically, and both deliberate and non-deliberate evocations of ‘the artificial relationships between dramatist and performer, performer and role, stage and audience’ (Lopez, p. 4). He rejects earlier critical tentativeness concerning the study of audiences, specifically efforts to understand the heterogenous make-up of the early modern audience; he claims that ‘the plays contain within themselves most of the evidence needed to understand what audiences expected and enjoyed and experienced’ (Lopez, p. 7). Furthermore, he cites anti-theatrical writings in his argument that plays were expected or perceived to have a ‘collective effect’ (Lopez, p. 21) on its spectators. His work includes evidence that there was little distinction to be made between audience response in public and private playhouses. I agree that playwrights provide indicators as to how a dramatic situation would have been received by an audience, which I will demonstrate in further detail below. I am also indebted to Lopez’s work on the aside in theatrical performance, specifically his contention that they can be disruptive, distracting the audience or depriving them of the chance to recognize artifice. I argue that this is the reason why there are so few asides during courtroom scenes, as then the onus is put on the audience to interpret events for themselves.

Stephen Orgel refers to the significance of women as spectators and plays’ consequent need to appeal to them in *From Script to Stage*, to which Smith contributes a study that explores the centrality of movement in performance and

²⁶⁵ Jeremy Lopez, *Theatrical Convention and Audience Response in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 3.

its ability to excite the passions of the audience.²⁶⁶ Jennifer A. Low and Nova Myhill acknowledge the critical dispute about who wields the most power in the playhouse: players and playwrights who use spectacle to enrapture or persuade the audience, or the audience which is needed for the companies comprising players and playwrights to survive.²⁶⁷ An overlapping field of study is that of early modern emotions or passions, resulting in works like *Shakespearean Sensations*, a collection of essays that combines the study of emotions with studies of the audience. The introduction acknowledges that an audience was vulnerable to the theatre's power,²⁶⁸ allowing Allison P. Hobgood to discuss the communicable nature of emotions or passions when represented on stage, dissolving the boundaries between player and spectator.²⁶⁹ Gina Bloom argues that through their depictions of games, early modern playwrights instructed the audience on 'the participatory demands of spectatorship';²⁷⁰ much like players of

²⁶⁶ Stephen Orgel, 'Introduction: a View from the Stage', in *From Script to Stage in Early Modern England*, ed. by Peter Holland and Stephen Orgel (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 1-8; Bruce Smith, 'E/loco/com/motion', in *From Script to Stage in Early Modern England*, pp. 131-150.

²⁶⁷ Jennifer A. Low and Nova Myhill, ed., *Imagining the Audience in Early Modern Drama, 1558-1642* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

²⁶⁸ Katharine A. Craik and Tanya Pollard, 'Introduction: Imagining audiences', in *Shakespearean Sensations: Experiencing Literature in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 1-28 (pp. 8-9).

²⁶⁹ Allison P. Hobgood, *Passionate Playgoing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

²⁷⁰ Gina Bloom, 'Games', in *Early Modern Theatricality*, ed. by Henry S. Turner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 189-211 (p. 191).

certain games are compelled to interpret what is occurring utilising ‘imperfect information’ (*Early Modern Theatricality*, p. 210), so an audience is compelled to interpret what is occurring on stage. Like a card player, the spectator must pick up on verbal and visual cues to understand what is transpiring.

Allison P. Hobgood echoes Lopez by acknowledging the reluctance of scholars to engage with the study of playgoers as there is little textual evidence to make firm, particularly new historicist, conclusions. Lopez contends that the answers may be found in the plays themselves; Hobgood prefers to study the interaction between theatre and the body, exploring how the audience thus encouraged performers to make their work ‘emotionally meaningful’ (Hobgood, p. 5) and in so doing ‘theatergoers [...] had the capacity to transform drama just as they were transformed by it’ (Hobgood, p. 6). Drama therefore became transactional, with spectators becoming ‘co-creators of the drama they attended’ (Hobgood, p. 73). She thus develops the work of Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan Jr., who demonstrated how the body and the environment are not isolated, distinct entities; rather, they feed into each other and ‘transactions between body and environment usually imply a conception of subjectivity of social identity’.²⁷¹ Their analysis of the role of two characters in *The Spanish Tragedy* partially inspired my treatment of particular characters in *The White Devil*, specifically their role as ‘meta-narrative markers’ (Floyd-Wilson and Sullivan Jr., p. 66) for an audience. Matthew Steggle meanwhile echoes Lopez when he suggests that clues to audience reactions can be found in the plays

²⁷¹ Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan Jr., ‘Introduction: Inhabiting the Body, Inhabiting the World’, in *Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England*, ed. by Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan Jr. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 1-13 (p. 3).

themselves. He recognises the ‘infectiousness of emotions’ in general and laughing and weeping in particular,²⁷² arguing that ‘early modern theatre still celebrates community’ (Steggles, p. 8) and was a space where communal expressions of emotions (uncontrollable or not) were welcomed.

This scholarly interest in the phenomenology of spectatorship signifies the importance of the spectator to the dramatist, with McManus providing an intriguing example in the form of Queen Anna during the performance of Thomas Campion’s *Somerset Masque*:

Anna, who, significantly, was not a masquer, was obliged to restore the lords on the King’s behalf by plucking a bough from a tree of gold, brought to her as she watched from the royal dais. This was a highly unusual moment: in no other masque was an audience member actively involved in the moment of transformation in this way, and in no other masque did actors leave the stage as its agents.²⁷³

Anna’s political influence was on the wane in 1613. Moreover, the gradual usurpation of the masque format by male performers at James’s court meant that she was deprived of one means of public performance and expression. However, she continued to have a significant role as a spectator because the masque ‘depended upon female engagement and raised the profile of female performance itself’ (McManus, p. 169). Her non-engagement in this drama could undermine everything it endeavours to achieve, in much the same way as a theatrical

²⁷² Matthew Steggles, *Laughing and Weeping in the Early Modern Theatres* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 7.

²⁷³ Clare McManus, *Women on the Renaissance Stage: Anna of Denmark and Female Masquing in the Stuart Court 1590-1619* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 167.

audience's refusal to respond in the way a playwright intended could derail a drama. This work highlights the importance of the audience as a participant in the theatrical process and how performances required them to respond in a particular way to what is being represented in order for the drama to succeed.

What is transparent from such research is the power of the theatre to engage the audience and the audience's participatory role in such engagement. I contend that this interaction is necessary to produce greater understanding of how women are frequently subject to representation that characterises them as something they are not, and the need for the wider public to recognize the ideological state apparatuses that perpetuate these fallacious understandings of womanhood, particularly in regard to her sexual condition. The playwright must persuade his audience that a character may be identified in a particular way rather than simply inform them of this fact: Shakespeare does not just instruct his audience to consider Desdemona innocent of Iago's calumny, he demonstrates it through her portrayal. A comparable process occurs in a trial setting in which prosecutors are required to persuade a jury or the public of someone's guilt. However, a trial also provides a woman with the opportunity to resist fallacious identification before an audience, and it is this phenomenon to which I will now direct my attention.

2. Use of Performative Spectacle in Trials and Audience Response

Critics such as Lorna Hutson emphasise the similarities between the theatre and the court, remarking that the

very rhetorical techniques for evaluating probabilities and likelihoods in legal narratives were perceived by dramatists in [...] London [...] to be indispensable for their purposes in bringing a new liveliness and power to fictions they were writing for the [...] commercial theatres'.²⁷⁴

Certainly both fora provide the opportunity for persuasive and evocative language to be presented before a critical audience. However, it is Peter Parolin who most fully elaborates on the similarity between theatrical performance and legal settings, noting how a woman's skills at masquing may be transferrable in a court of law and can be a source of power. He does so through the case of Aletheia Talbot, Countess of Arundel, who in April 1622 defended herself against accusations that she had participated 'in the Foscari affair, a treason scandal that was rocking Venice'.²⁷⁵ As a result she 'appeared twice in the *Collegio* of the Venetian Senate' (Parolin, p. 219), publicly performing her innocence against accusations otherwise made by the English Ambassador Sir Henry Wotton. A frequent participant in court masques, Arundel was familiar with performance, specifically performance that reaffirmed her identity as she wished it to be perceived. I agree with Parolin's contention

that Lady Arundel exploited the Foscari affair as a theatrical opportunity that she could turn to her own advantage. Through performance, Lady Arundel sought in Venice not only to clear her name but also assert a greater control over

²⁷⁴ Lorna Hutson, *The Invention of Suspicion: Law and Mimesis in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 2.

²⁷⁵ Peter Parolin, 'The Venetian Theater of Aletheia Talbot, Countess of Arundel' in *Women Players in England, 1500-1660: Beyond the All-Male Stage*, ed. by Pamela Allen Brown and Peter Parolin (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 219-240 (p. 219).

her public identity and to gain access to a measure of participation in public affairs (Parolin, p. 220).

She sought the opportunity to perform before the Venetian senate in much the same way as Desdemona is forced to perform, the former actively resisting the negative characterisation of her by Wotton. As Parolin remarks, this performance echoes that of lower-class women in court settings as well as her own earlier courtly dramatics, illustrating the connection between the court and the stage as areas for female representation; both require an audience to be engaged with the process of constructing a woman's social identity that is often defined in terms of her sexual conduct. Inevitably, an aristocratic woman such as Arundel is tainted by the very fact of her public appearance and speech, in much the same way as a rape survivor could be tainted by vigorous resistance that could be characterised as inappropriately unfeminine. However, what her performance demonstrates conclusively is a resistance to the efforts of a patriarchal authority – in her case Wotton – to impose a social identity upon her that she rejects.

I reference Parolin's work as it elucidates the overlap between theatrical and legal performance spaces, both arenas affording an opportunity for female resistance to male efforts to categorise them sexually and socially. The fact is that a trial resembles the theatre in that it afforded women the opportunity to express such resistance and actively attempt to convince an audience – whether spectators or a jury – of how she should be perceived. Of course, such opportunity is curtailed in the playhouses as this female resistance is conveyed through boy players performing the words of male dramatists, and further research is required into how the theatrical formation of female identity is affected by the lack of female participation on the public stage. The sexual categorisation of female

characters onstage would provide an intriguing parallel to Kathleen McLuskie's observations that '[f]or a woman character to be adequately represented on the stage, the category woman disintegrates into the components of the moral typology – chaste lady, courtesan, married love, nuptial strife – which equally depend upon systems of signification'.²⁷⁶ Such analysis is beyond the scope of my thesis, but I will note that Korda's research into the contributions of women to theatrical production and how it influenced the portrayal of female characters is a useful beginning. Playwrights and performers could also be inspired by the words and actions of women in another public arena, one to which the English public had easy access and women were encouraged to perform for an audience: church courts. This was the legal setting in which matters concerning a woman's sexual identity were frequently adjudicated. It is therefore worth considering the processes and role of church courts in early modern life, specifically women's lives.

3. Church Courts: *The White Devil* and *The Spanish Curate*

There were two primary legal arenas in early modern England: the church courts and common law courts. I will focus on the former as it was the church courts in which matters concerning marriages and sexual misconduct were debated and adjudicated and it was these courts that 'enjoyed something of a revival from 1570 to 1640'.²⁷⁷ Martin Ingram clarified the role of the church

²⁷⁶ Kathleen McLuskie, 'The Act, the Role, and the Actor: Boy Actresses on the Elizabethan Stage', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 3 (1987), pp. 120-30 (p. 125).

²⁷⁷ Lorna Hutson, *The Invention of Suspicion: Law and Mimesis in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 43.

courts in early modern life, noting that prosecutions could be initiated by an injured party or by the court itself, although the primary objective was not to punish offences: rather, these suits ‘were intended to *reform* the culprit, and were ostensibly undertaken ‘for the soul’s health’ (*pro salute animae*)’.²⁷⁸ As Paul Raffield notes, ‘[d]espite the spiritual nature of the offence, the juridical consequences of fornication were of a highly visible temporal nature, involving public humiliation, the performance of penance in a public place, and excommunication from the parish community’.²⁷⁹ The humiliation this often incurred, especially when the defendant was obliged to perform a public penance, was intended to act as a public deterrent. It was a performance of shame, inflicted on a sexually-transgressive woman by a patriarchal authority. Not uncoincidentally, Elizabeth Shore experienced this very punishment for her relationship with Edward IV. In this respect, ‘the church courts reflected the fact that in early modern England the notions of ‘sin’ and ‘crime were not clearly differentiated’ (Ingram, p. 3). The most common forms of dispute brought before the church courts were matters concerning marriage formation and dissolution, an area in which injured parties often brought suits against alleged or unsatisfactory spouses. It was here that individuals could claim or deny marriage to another, obliging the ecclesiastical authorities to adjudicate the matter; also, it was in these courts that parties could endeavour to end their union. Another principal cause for legal action concerned sexual immorality: ‘[s]landerous words, when alleging

²⁷⁸ Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 3.

²⁷⁹ Paul Raffield, *Shakespeare’s Imaginary Constitution: Late-Elizabethan Politics and the Theatre of Law* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2010), p. 204.

specific immoral conduct as adultery or fornication, were primarily sued in the church courts as private defamation suits but sometimes also as ‘office’ cases pursued by the ecclesiastical authorities’.²⁸⁰ Such immoral living included activities that affected the spiritual health of the community and the holy institution of marriage. Unsurprisingly, the primary targets of such accusations were women. Defamation cases were also frequently brought before church authorities, a category of legal proceeding that was notable for the prevalence of female litigants. These suits often focused on sexual slander, a woman objecting to another’s characterisation of her as promiscuous, adulterous, or otherwise behaving in a manner offensive to early modern prescriptions for good female behaviour.

I have focused on these popular areas of legal contention as they all feature prominently in the two plays I will examine below. Webster’s *The White Devil* depicts a woman obliged to defend herself against accusations of adultery and whoredom, reflecting both the practice of church courts in bringing suit against sexual offenders within the community and a woman’s vulnerability to sexual defamation. Meanwhile, Fletcher and Massinger’s *The Spanish Curate* portrays a male litigant intent on proving that what he had previously characterised as an extra-marital affair was in fact a marriage, the legitimacy of which he intends to prove in court. It must be noted, however, that neither legal proceeding depicted by Webster, Fletcher, or Massinger occurs in a church court. This is for two reasons. Firstly, neither play has England as its official setting.

²⁸⁰ Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England*, Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History, ed. by Anthony Fletcher, John Guy, and John Morrill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 100.

Secondly, the elevated social status of the litigants in both trials means that their cases are brought before authorities of greater rank than the local magistrate or ecclesiastical authorities that would govern a community's church court.

I contend that the audience's familiarity with the church courts provides the primary reason for considering the plays' proceedings in light of English ecclesiastical justice. The typical early modern audience member would have little or no experience of courts or trials outside the practices of their local community, where 'at a local level the church courts exerted a high level of surveillance and coercive authority over citizens' (Raffield, p. 207). It would thus be of little benefit for a playwright who wishes to entertain his audience to indulge in lengthy depictions of foreign legal proceedings which would be beyond their comprehension or interest. Holger Schott Syme may argue that English justice, characterised by its reliance on juries, is never represented on the early modern stage for a variety of 'mimetic, economic and/or dramaturgical' reasons, but he also acknowledges that several other features of English legal practice find their way onstage – including the similarities between audiences at trials and the audience in the theatre, both of whom cannot affect the outcome of the trial.²⁸¹ As Dena Goldberg notes, the satirical points addressed by the playwrights in the trial scenes would lose their piquancy and relevance if the legal setting were not familiar to the average English audience.²⁸²

²⁸¹ Holger Schott Syme, '(Mis)representing Justice on the Early Modern Stage', *Studies in Philology*, 109 (2012) <doi:10.1353/sip.2012.0006>, pp. 63-85 (p. 84).

²⁸² Dena Goldberg, *Between Worlds: A study of the Plays of John Webster* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1987), p. 49.

The second issue regarding the social status of the litigants may be addressed in a similar fashion to the first – namely, the typical audience member’s familiarity with church courts obliged the playwrights to frame their legal proceedings as matters of ecclesiastical justice, especially considering that the issues under discussion in the respective trial scenes of *The White Devil* and *The Spanish Curate* comprised the majority of church court cases. While legal matters concerning litigants or defendants who occupied the rank of the nobility in England would often be tried in the more refined settings of the Star Chamber, the playwrights do not show a preoccupation with this particular court’s proceedings for two reasons: because of the familiarity of the audiences with the church courts and because the foreign setting of the plays would make a detailed representation of the Star Chamber unnecessary. Ultimately, early modern playwrights were aware enough of their audiences to oblige them with a court setting sufficiently familiar that the legal proceedings of these foreign characters and social superiors remained relevant and interesting to Jacobean Londoners.

The playwrights under discussion in this chapter thus present their foreign trial scenes as fundamentally English, evoking the playgoer’s familiarity with church court proceedings. They achieve this in different ways for each play. Webster employs the character of the English ambassador as a choric figure in his depiction of Vittoria’s trial, one of the many ambassadors invited by the ecclesiastical authority (Monticelso) to witness the legal proceedings. Frequently the English ambassador is called upon to comment on the conduct of defendant and accuser/judge. By including the English ambassador on stage as a spectator to

the proceedings against Vittoria, the playwright frames the trial scene as a legal proceeding intended to be witnessed by the English; moreover, the audience shares the role of spectator with the ambassador character, with the fictional spectator providing a bridge between audience and players that largely dispels the notion that ‘the kind of judgment passed by audiences is clearly distinct from the judgment of a jury or judge, always at one remove from the fact-finding activities of the trial itself’ (Schott Syme, p. 80). Webster thus encourages the audience to identify with the ambassador as a fellow national and fellow spectator, and the swathe of English spectators witnessing a court proceeding evokes the reality of the English church courts which would be similarly surrounded by spectators engaged with the legal affairs they are witnessing.

This English community of spectators automatically encourages the identification of the trial as an English proceeding, and this impression is exacerbated by Vittoria’s demand that the trial not be conducted in Latin, a language that was strongly associated with Roman Catholic settings and particularly Roman Catholic ecclesiasts like Monticelso; her rejection of this tongue and the fact that the authorities acquiesce to her demand is also a rejection of the specifically Italian setting of the court. Moreover, the echoes of Queen Katherine’s similar request in Shakespeare and Fletcher’s *Henry VIII* evokes memories of the infamous Blackfriars trial, a quintessentially English proceeding that had the Queen of England (like Vittoria) insist that Church authorities conduct their inquiry in the familiar vernacular understood by the common man – the language employed by the English church courts in a land that had earlier rejected the practices of Roman Catholicism.

Further reasons why *The Spanish Curate* should be viewed through the lens of English church courts concern the intricacies of marriage formation, particulars that are the subject of the trial portrayed and which were the remit of church courts in England. Before I address this further, however, I must clarify what constituted the majority of the legal proceedings that occurred in this particular institution. I will then be able to explore the two plays under discussion in this chapter in the light of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century church courts; after all, it is this legal institution that frames the early modern understanding of marriage and sexual morality, which are essential when examining the depiction of women's resistance to fallacious categorisation that does not recognise the evolving meaning of 'mistress'.

(a) Trying Adultery and Sexual Immorality

As I observed above, the primary purpose of church courts was to reform wrongdoers, holding up their misdeeds to the public gaze and effectively shaming them into compliance with social expectations of good behaviour. In 1604 several laws were instituted in an effort to regulate the proceedings of church courts, clarifying that churchwardens needed to identify any of their 'brethren [who] offend[ed], either by Adulterie, whoredome, Incest [...] or any other vncleannesse and wickednesse of life'.²⁸³ Unfortunately, little effort was made to distinguish different 'kinds of sexual offence' (Ingram, p. 239), thus providing the authorities with 'considerable discretionary powers to deal with notorious cases of adultery or incontinence' (Ingram, pp. 150-1). A judicial separation between spouses was

²⁸³ 'CIX. Notorious Crimes and Scandals to be certified into Ecclesiasticall Courts by presentment', in *Constitutio[ns] and canons ecclesiasticall* (London: 1604), R3^r.

allowed if the husband could prove that his wife had committed adultery. However, the husband's adultery was not sufficient grounds for a separation, and therefore cases of adultery were traditionally pursued against female defendants. Furthermore, accusations of sexual incontinence were levelled at women rather than men as the honour of women depended almost exclusively on their chastity, and when a woman fails to live up to societal expectations of good feminine behaviour then the community as a whole suffers. Ingram does note, however, that prosecutions of married females for immodesty were comparatively rare and it was difficult to tell what constituted sufficiently 'questionable' behaviour to merit a prosecution for immorality. Far more common were defamation suits, charges of slander or libel often brought by women against other women in which their sexual honesty was questioned or disparaged. The prevalence of these suits indicates just how vital a woman's reputation for chastity and modesty was to her identity.

The procedures of the church courts differ significantly from modern trials, specifically in regards to the role of the judge. Rather than impartially witnessing a prosecutor present a case, '[t]he judge could not only accuse the person he was judging; he could also conduct an inquisition' (Goldberg, p. 45). Goldberg continues by noting that 'the judge was not even constrained to present the defendant with definite charges [...] Character assassination [...] commonly made up the bulk of the evidence' (Goldberg, p. 45). Such practices allowed the authorities to use the church courts as they saw fit, especially as a public arena in which a woman may be forced to account for her behaviour and endure the judge's effort to categorise her as either a good, chaste woman or an 'unruly woman'.

Holger Schott Syme claims that dramatists like Webster set ‘scenes of judgment’ in foreign courts as a contrast ‘to the essential probing of English trials’ (Schott Syme, p. 69), citing the fact that the ‘judge and prosecutor are the same person’ (Schott Syme, p. 68-9) in *The White Devil* as evidence. I disagree, for as I demonstrate above the fact that an ecclesiastical authority may serve such dual roles in a church court trial (represented effectively in *The White Devil*) signifies to an audience that they should view the supposed Italian trial of Vittoria as a quintessentially English proceeding. The key to this interpretative framework is the character of Monticelso, a Roman cardinal whose role in the court is simultaneously prosecutor and judge, able to ‘conduct an inquisition’ which could consist primarily of ‘[c]haracter assassination’ (Goldberg, p. 45). Lisa-Jane Klotz agrees with Goldberg’s assessment of Monticelso’s judicial conduct, and Webster draws the audience’s attention to it when he has the accused Vittoria object to the dual role that Monticelso occupies in the trial setting:²⁸⁴ ‘If you be my accuser / Pray cease to be my judge, come from the bench’ (*The White Devil*, III.2.225-6). In addition to this, Monticelso’s social position as a church authority positions him comfortably within the world of ecclesiastical justice, embodied by church courts. This and the fact that Monticelso acts as both judge and prosecutor is evidence for my argument that an early modern audience would recognise the proceedings depicted in an Italian courtroom as characteristic of English church courts.

²⁸⁴ Lisa-Jane Klotz, ‘“Suspicion is no proof.” Legal Proof and Probability in Practice and Fiction in Early Modern England’, PhD dissertations, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2006).

(b) Cases of Marriage Formation

The other principal concern of English church courts concerned marriage formation. Early modern England had a unique system of laws governing marriage in this period, a consequence of the Henrician Reformation and Elizabethan Settlement of religion. The country's distinctly Anglican form of Protestantism meant that while traditional Catholic methods of marital dissolution were no longer sought after, neither were the more extreme solutions implemented in nations that fully embraced Calvinism sought after. By the seventeenth century, there were two primary means by which a marriage could be ended in England: securing an annulment, which effectively stated that due to a previously unacknowledged or unrecognised impediment the marriage never truly existed (or was 'invalid', as Henry VIII claimed several times when dissolving his first marriage), allowing the partners to remarry but bastardising the children and depriving the woman of her dower rights; and 'judicial separation "from bed and board"', which was granted only when charges of adultery or extreme cruelty could be proved against the wife or husband respectively, preventing the erstwhile couple from remarrying but not affecting the children or the wife's dower rights' (Ingram, p. 149). As Tim Stretton observes, various scholars have speculated on how easy it was for an early modern person to separate from their spouse. Lawrence Stone, for instance, claimed that it was extremely difficult to dissolve a marriage after the Reformation which led to many marital desertions, a stance

challenged by R. H. Helmholz and Ingram.²⁸⁵ However, ‘few historians dispute the legal, ecclesiastical and social strength of the institution of marriage between the mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries’ (Stretton, p. 18). The uniquely Anglican Protestantism of early modern England meant that the country did not embrace the practices of many Continental Protestant nations which allowed for the possibility of separation and remarriage; indeed, in 1604 ‘the canons [...] strongly reaffirmed the traditional ban on remarriage after a decree of separation “from bed and board”’ (Ingram, p. 147). They also passed a bigamy act, thus confronting a recognised consequence of clandestine marriages ‘and the poorly regulated issue of marriage licences’ (Ingram, p. 149). Therefore, anyone trapped in an unhappy marriage without grounds for an annulment was left with two options: ‘formal church court separations, which were difficult and expensive to obtain and hard to enforce, or informal (and illegal) practices such as desertion or wife sale’ (Stretton, p. 19). The church courts, as with cases of adultery, defamation, or sexual immorality, governed the institution of marriage on a local level.

Often the most frequent cases brought before the church courts concerned questions about marriage formation; specifically, what exactly constituted a marriage and how binding was it? Raffield observes that ‘[m]arriage could be contracted by consent alone, without church ceremony, so long as consent was notified in the present tense’ (Raffield, p. 205). This essential truth

²⁸⁵ Tim Stretton, ‘Marriage, Separation and the Common Law in England, 1540-1660’, in *The Family in Early Modern England*, ed. Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 18.

notwithstanding, the early modern English marriage laws were complex, with three main forms of valid marital contract recognised by '[c]anon law'. Firstly, *per verba de praesenti*: an indissoluble union created through private promise as described by Raffield above. Secondly, *per verba de futuro*: a 'binding agreement to marry [...] although prior to consummation or formal celebration, the engagement could be dissolved by mutual consent' (Raffield, p. 205) 'or even repudiated unilaterally in certain circumstances' (Ingram, p.190). Thirdly, conditional contracts: a contract to marry if certain conditions were met such as parental consent or financial support (Ingram, p. 190). *Per verba de praesenti* overrode all other contracts but the future and conditional contracts became indissoluble if they were 'sealed by sexual intercourse' (*Domestic Dangers*, p. 143). R. B. Outhwaite observes that '[t]he increasing unwillingness of judges to give decisions in favour of ill-witnessed and unsolemnised unions meant that such suits were not worth the trouble and expense involved';²⁸⁶ this fact may have encouraged couples to solemnize their marriage at church rather than rely on verbal contracts. Indeed, the Council of Trent clarified for the Catholic nations that such contracts required solemnisation in church to be considered valid and comparable changes were made in Protestant nations. Nevertheless, '[s]imilar projects in England never came to fruition' (*Domestic Dangers*, p. 140), requiring church courts to adjudicate on these matters. Ingram alleges that the church courts endeavoured to inculcate the need for solemnisation of contracts in the church rather than relying on the mere words of contracts, and he claims that the

²⁸⁶ R. B. Outhwaite, *The Rise and Fall of the English Ecclesiastical Courts, 1500-1860*, Cambridge Studies in English Legal History (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 53.

decreased number of cases concerning marriage formation over the years proved its effectiveness. However, I agree with Outhwaite that fewer cases does not necessarily mean that solemnisation in churches became the norm: 'Many couples were clearly coming together sexually after the exchange of informal promises to marry, indicating that the moral dictates of the church were not being obeyed by a substantial proportion of newly married couples' (Outhwaite, p. 51).

Nevertheless, as long as there was confusion among the laity 'about the finer points of canon law on the making or breaking of marriage' (Stretton, p. 32), the church courts were still called upon to judge what exactly constituted a marriage. This became particularly emotive when a female plaintiff alleged that she had entered into a *per verba de praesenti* contract with a man and, believing herself married, consummated her relationship with her 'husband'; the man, meanwhile, claimed that there had been no contract and that they had merely engaged in extra-marital sex. It is this type of suit that is of particular interest to me in this chapter and will form the focus of the rest of this section.

Ingram claims the cases 'in which the [male] defendant had probably made some kind of promise of marriage, but insincerely or with fraudulent intention', comprised 'about 10 per cent of the better recorded cases' (Ingram, p. 199). Abigail Dyer observes that the Spanish had a name for this practice in 'ecclesiastical court records' where women 'sued their lovers for "estupro bajo palabra de matrimonio," an offence best translated as "seduction by promise of marriage"'.²⁸⁷ Such behaviour was not unique to Spain, as evidenced by records

²⁸⁷ Abigail Dyer, 'Seduction by Promise of Marriage: Law, Sex, and Culture in Seventeenth-Century Spain', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 34, (2003), pp. 439-455 (pp. 439-40).

in the Essex Quarter Sessions Bundles which include the account of Mary Marvell in 1656: 'Who saith [...] one Alexander Hill cordwainer was with this examinant at the White Hart in Maldon, and promising her marriage prevailed with her to lie with him as his wife. [...] The next Lord's day he met her [...] and that night the said Alexander and the examinant lay together as husband and wife, he promising still to make her his wife'.²⁸⁸ What such a case demonstrates is that a woman who sleeps with a man after entering into an unwitnessed and unsolemnized marital contract with him was vulnerable; he need only deny that he promised her marriage and it becomes very difficult for a woman to prove otherwise in a church court. The ecclesiastical authorities may take into account other supposed 'evidence' of marriage, obliging 'litigants and their witnesses [...] 'to interpret conjugality': 'they referred both to the words of betrothal and to a set of rituals and custom which provided their context. They focused in particular on the transactions of courtship: the exchange, offer, or refusal of words, gestures, emotions, and gifts' (*Domestic Dangers*, pp. 140-1). Ultimately, however, the case could be reduced to the simple question of whose testimony the judges believed: the man or woman's.

What is decided in such church court trials over marriage formation is nothing less than a woman's social and sexual identity. A woman bringing a case before the church court alleging 'seduction by promise' is making a gamble: a gamble that her testimony will be believed above that of her male adversary, a

²⁸⁸ 'Promising her marriage: Mary Marvell, 1656', in *Women's Worlds in Seventeenth-Century England: A Sourcebook*, ed. by Patricia Crawford and Laura Gowing (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 139-40 (p. 140).

gamble that the ecclesiastical authorities will find in her favour and compel her seducer to fulfil his promise to wed her. If she should fail, then she has announced before her community that she is a fallen woman, one who has engaged in extra-marital sexual relations and may risk categorisation as a whore. Similarly, should a marriage of some duration subsequently prove invalid, then the woman who had believed herself a wife for all those years becomes something else – namely a ‘mistress’ in its modern meaning. Both these dilemmas are confronted by the primary female protagonists of Fletcher and Massinger’s *The Spanish Curate*.

I contend that the main reason why *The Spanish Curate* must be viewed through the lens of the English church courts is two-fold: firstly, as in *The White Devil*, the trial concerns an aspect of life that is traditionally governed by English church courts. The legal proceedings in Fletcher and Massinger’s play are initiated by a man endeavouring to prove that his earlier liaison with a young woman had actually constituted a marriage and that the offspring that resulted from their union should thus be legitimised. Secondly, the nature of Henrique’s suit characterises it as quintessentially English as the Spanish court would not have been obliged to deliberate over the legitimacy of a *per verba de praesenti* contract – that is, a verbal unwitnessed marriage contract between two individuals: as a Catholic nation, Spain would have accepted the Council of Trent’s injunction that all marriages must be solemnised in a church in order to be considered valid. Only England’s unique marriage laws meant that a *per verba de praesenti* contract could still invalidate later, solemnised marriages, thus firmly situating *The Spanish Curate* within an English legal context.

I have demonstrated how the representation of the respective trials in *The White Devil* and *The Spanish Curate* reflect the church courts with which the

majority of the audience would have been familiar. The audiences of the play trials thus mirror the audiences present at church courts, powerless to affect the outcome of the trial presided over by a magistrate yet still capable of critically engaging with the verbal evidence presented before them. The playwrights enhance this effect by alluding to famous early modern English court cases in which the sexual categorisation of a woman was the principal object. Therefore, before I commence my close reading of *The White Devil*, I will first summarise the contemporary court case that is frequently evoked throughout the play.

4. *The White Devil* by John Webster

a) The Influence of the Trial(s) of Frances Howard

The trial of Frances Howard was a contemporary *cause célèbre*, and her public life managed to include an ecclesiastical inquiry into the legitimacy of her marriage and a trial in which she was variously characterised as both an adulteress and murderess. Born in approximately 1592, Frances Howard belonged to the influential Howard family.²⁸⁹ Married to the 3rd Earl of Essex in 1606, Howard sued for an annulment seven years later citing her husband's impotence. An ecclesiastical commission was authorised to investigate this charge, and Howard submitted herself to a virginity test. Frances attained her wish and her marriage was annulled on the grounds of non-consummation, allowing her to swiftly remarry Robert Carr in 1613. The court was aware from the beginning that Howard desired the end of her marriage to Essex so that she might contract a more advantageous match with King James's favourite, Robert Carr, with whom

²⁸⁹ I am indebted to David Lindley's *The Trials of Frances Howard: Fact and Fiction at the Court of King James* (London: Routledge, 1996).

she had probably ‘become romantically involved’ around 1611/12.²⁹⁰ Howard’s family were supportive of her suit as a marriage to Carr would have ‘signalled the triumph of the Howard clan in the political world of James’s court’.²⁹¹ The King was also keen to oblige his favourite, and ‘[w]hen the commission leaned towards not allowing the annulment, James stacked the commission with two more persons willing to vote for it’.²⁹² Others, however, were opposed to the Howard clan gaining even more political influence. One such opponent to this marriage was Sir Thomas Overbury, once a good friend of Carr and composer of the letters that passed between the lovers, who alienated Carr when he advised against this matrimonial match.²⁹³ On 21st April 1613 Overbury was sent ‘to the Tower [of London] for contempt’ (Bellany, p. 50) when he refused ‘the offer of [an] ambassadorship’ by the King,²⁹⁴ likely a contrived excuse to prevent Overbury from ‘interfering in the nullity proceedings’ (Somerset, p. 108) regarding the

²⁹⁰ Alastair Bellany, ‘Howard, Frances, countess of Somerset (1590-1632)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://oxforddnb.com> [accessed 26 August 2016]. I will refer to this source as *ODNB* for the rest of this chapter.

²⁹¹ Martin Butler and David Lindley, ‘Restoring Astraea: Jonson’s Masque for the Fall of Somerset’, *ELH*, 61 (1994), pp. 807-27 (p. 814).

²⁹² Johanna Rickman, *Love, Lust, and License in Early Modern England: Illicit Sex and the Nobility*, *Women and Gender in the Early Modern World*, ed. by Allyson Poska and Abby Zanger (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 75.

²⁹³ Alastair Bellany, *The Politics of Court Scandal in Early Modern England: New Culture and the Overbury Affair, 1603-1660*, *Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History*, ed. by Anthony Fletcher, John Guy and John Morrill (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 52.

²⁹⁴ Anne Somerset, *Unnatural Murder: Poison at the Court of James I* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), p. 109.

Essex case. Shortly thereafter, he died and the marriage between Carr and Howard was solemnised. Events were not to conclude there, however.

As David Lindley observes, it was ‘during the summer of 1615 [that] rumours of foul play began to circulate openly (Lindley, p. 146), specifically regarding Overbury’s death. Indeed, upon his incarceration the Howards removed the current lieutenant of the Tower and replaced him with Sir Gervase Elwes; meanwhile, a ‘former servant’²⁹⁵ of Howard’s ‘friend and confidante’ (Somerset, p. 73) Anne Turner was ‘chosen as Overbury’s keeper’ (*Mistress Turner’s Deadly Sins*, p. 182) at the instigation of Frances’ (Lindley, p. 146). This occurred in May, and by September Overbury was dead. The troubling rumours now circulating about his favourite’s in-laws encouraged the King to instruct ‘Elwes to set down all he knew in writing’ (Lindley, p. 146). Elwes denied personal guilt but he pointed his finger at Richard Weston in his letter to the King; James then ‘ordered Sir Edward Coke [Lord Chief Justice] to take control of the investigation’ (Somerset, p. 73). Weston implicated several people, including Anne Turner and the new Countess of Somerset, Frances Howard (Lindley, p. 147), in a plot to poison Overbury with ‘[p]otions and powders, disguised as medicine, [...] poisoned pies and jellies [...] and, when all else failed, [...] a poisoned enema’ – the latter of which had been provided by ‘an apothecary’s assistant’ (Bellany, p. 56). Carr and a pregnant Howard were subsequently confined on the 17th October, and Carr was conveyed to the Tower a month later. Those indicted as accomplices to this murder, including Weston and Turner, were

²⁹⁵ Alastair Bellany, ‘Mistress Turner’s Deadly Sin: Sartorial Transgression, Court Scandal and Politics in Early Stuart England,’ *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 58 (1995), 179-210 <DOI: 10.2307/3817820> (p. 182).

tried, convicted and executed for their complicity in the murder, and during their trials ‘prosecutors and judges publicly proclaimed the countess’s guilt, and she quickly became the most vilified of the Overbury murderers’ (*ODNB*). Pamphlets and libels portrayed Frances as an adulteress and poisoner, a whore who bewitched her first husband and made him impotent only with her so that she might wed her powerful lover. In 1616, Howard ‘plead guilty to accessory to murder and Carr was found guilty as well, although he insisted that he was innocent’ (Rickman, p. 81). They both were spared execution through the King’s intervention, receiving pardons and being ‘released from Tower in 1622’ (Rickman, p. 81). Howard’s years after her release were quiet, but the memory of her role in the Overbury scandal lived on.

The significance of Frances Howard’s infamous life to this chapter is evident in the two legal proceedings which captured the early modern imagination. The dissolution of Howard’s marriage to Essex echoes the issues at stake in the Blackfriars trial - namely those of non-consummation and the desire to end an inconvenient marriage when another, more attractive prospect waits in the wings. The subsequent annulment of Howard’s marriage is, like Henry VIII’s, mired in controversy; the claims of the participants that Essex was capable of consummating a marriage but not with Howard raised spectres of witchcraft – for how else could one explain why a man was impotent with only one woman? This question troubled the Archbishop of Canterbury who worried ‘that there had never before been a case in English law in which a man had been recognised as impotent towards his wife but virile with other women’ (Somerset, p. 124), while the involvement of suspected sorcerer Dr Simon Forman in the affair led to accusations of witchcraft against both Howard and Turner: ‘As part of the case

against Mrs Turner [...] the prosecution displayed in court a series of magical writings and images that Anne Tuner and Frances Howard had allegedly commissioned from the astrologer-physician and part-time magus Simon Forman' (Bellany, p. 149). The King's evident partiality also throws a shade on the proceedings.

Already the social and sexual identity of Frances Howard is being constructed in the public eye, with observers ranging from courtiers like Overbury to the wider public characterising her as 'whore', 'adulteress' and 'witch'. For instance, one verse stated the following: 'Letchery did consult with witcherye / how to procure frygiditye'.²⁹⁶ Others questioned the legitimacy of the 'virginity test', during which Howard wore a veil and which led to suspicions of a 'bed-trick':

This Dame was inspected but Fraude interjected

A maide of more perfection

Whome the midwyffes did handle whilse the Knight held the
candle

O there was a cleare inspection.²⁹⁷

The implication, of course, is that Frances Howard could not be a virgin. Such negative characterisations of Howard were seemingly confirmed by her imprisonment for Overbury's murder; a woman perceived as an adulteress or whore is inevitably capable of murder in patriarchal discourse.

²⁹⁶ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson D 1048, fol. 64.

²⁹⁷ Chester, Chester City Record Office, MS CR 63.2.19, fol. 14.

I will elaborate on certain facets of Frances Howard's trials in my section on *The White Devil*. The conclusion of Howard's legal story – specifically her arrest and eventual confession – occurred after Webster completed *The White Devil*, so I cannot claim that Vittoria's trial for adultery and murder was inspired by Frances Howard's experience. However, the Essex divorce proceedings and the scandalous rumours that accompanied them were contemporaneous and would certainly have influenced playwright and public when composing and viewing Webster's play; moreover, there are obvious echoes of Howard's marital adventures in the playwright's representation of a court lady who, assisted by her family, engages in an extra-marital relationship with a nobleman that results in scandal. Although the revelation of murder and Frances Howard's eventual disgrace post-date the play, the narrative of Frances Howard and Vittoria's falls are sufficiently similar to invite comparison, for they demonstrate the shared experience of noblewomen who are put on trial and assigned a specific social identity that they may resist. By referencing the similarities between the two women's experiences, I will show that Webster's play is an accurate reflection of accused women's experience in a legal setting and the early modern practice of assigning social identities to women.

b) The Trial of Vittoria

Although frequently identified as a 'strumpet' (*The White Devil*, II.1.58, 390) or 'whore' (III.2.77) by partisan male authorities, Vittoria is identified accurately as a 'mistress' by the Conjuror: 'And now they are come with purpose

to apprehend / Your mistress, fair Vittoria' (II.2.48-9).²⁹⁸ With no personal investment in the character or subsequent events, his word is more reliable than many others', and considering the patent sexuality that characterises Vittoria's relationship with Brachiano, the Conjuror clearly uses 'mistress' in its modern meaning. However, other identities are consistently ascribed to her and she resists them throughout the play. In this section I will conduct a chronological close reading of the trial scene in particular as well as pertinent events that are connected to the portrayal of Vittoria in court. I will highlight three essential elements of Webster's work: the partisanship of the trial conducted, the efforts of male characters to interpret female behaviour to their own satisfaction, and female resistance to both these injustices. In so doing, I will illustrate how the dramatist encourages audience sympathy for Vittoria's resistance, her refusal to be vilified. Webster thus depicts the limitations of the system of social characterisation for a character such as Vittoria when society has not fully embraced the evolving modern meaning of 'mistress'.

It is worth briefly considering prior critical work on the legal aspects of *The White Devil*. Of particular interest is Goldberg's observation that Vittoria's 'ability to play to the gallery' (Goldberg, p. 45) resembled the conduct of several famous early moderns who submitted to trial (namely the Earl of Essex, the Earl of Southampton, and Sir Walter Raleigh), thus inspiring my search for famous *female* defendants. However, I am troubled by her psychological explanation for Vittoria's dramatic appeal, preferring to consider the manner in which the

²⁹⁸ John Webster, *The White Devil*, New Mermaids, ed. by Christina Luckyj (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008).

character would be perceived by an early modern audience and the key role of the courtly spectators in indicating how the court actors are performing. Nevertheless, Goldberg does effectively comment upon the compromising corruption of the accusers which undermines their moral authority - a theme I will expand upon later.

I am greatly indebted to Lindley as an essential source for information on Frances Howard's trial, but he also draws some intriguing parallels between Vittoria's trial and the accusations levelled at Howard as part of his larger project – an exploration of the way trials become a medium through which the authorities may impose a narrative upon events. Despite this I cannot agree with his confident assertion that Vittoria 'does consent to her husband's death' (Lindley, p. 5); I suggest that he does not recognise the same level of ambiguity in Vittoria's case as he does in Frances Howard's. I am much more in agreement with Klotz (2006), who similarly recognises the identification Webster makes between the spectators and the audience, thus positioning the early modern playgoer as the ultimate juror. She also addresses a controversial facet of Vittoria's character which similarly intrigues me: does Vittoria, as Lindley claims, 'consent' to the murders? Klotz addresses the significance of male characters' interpretations of Vittoria in this instance, which forms the core of my analysis below.

The first act of *The White Devil* introduces several key themes that will become relevant during the trial scene in Act Three. The banished count Ludovico informs the audience of the sexual scandal that is about to engulf the Roman aristocracy:

The Duke of Brachiano, now lives in Rome,

And by close panderism seeks to prostitute

The honour of Vittoria Corombona:

Vittoria, she that might have got my pardon

For one kiss to the Duke (*The White Devil*, I.1.40-4).

The phrase ‘close panderism’ immediately links Vittoria in the imagination with whoredom and secrecy, a reductive characterisation of her that men insist upon throughout the course of the play. However, this classification of Vittoria is undermined even in this small speech as the influence over Brachiano that Ludovico attributes to her implies that the authority and power she wields is superior to that of the common whore. Instead, it evokes the representational strategies of the ‘ruler’s mistress’ who usurps the authority of the wife: Brachiano has sufficient authority over Ludovico potentially to revoke his banishment, and Vittoria could have usurped the prerogatives of the wife to encourage the husband to have mercy. This already suggests to the audience that she belongs to the category of ‘sexual mistress’.

Vittoria appears in scene two and she initially has little to say, but I argue that elements of Frances Howard’s story are detectable in this scene, specifically in the efforts of a woman to avoid sexual relations with her husband. *The White Devil* was composed several years after Howard married Essex and the public may have already become aware of the couple’s physical estrangement. Howard was certainly in the public eye at this point, dancing in two separate masques in 1609 and 1610, and Lindley notes that the Essex ‘marriage quickly disintegrated after Essex’s return to claim his bride’ in 1609 (Lindley, p. 43). The divorce proceedings would draw public attention to the non-consummation of the

marriage in 1612/13, but rumours about their lack of conjugal felicity were already abroad by 1610 as evidenced by Samuel Calvert's letter to William Trumbull: 'My Lord Cranborne begins to look sour upon his wife. So hath my Lord of Essex cause, for they say plots have been laid by his [wife] to poison him'.²⁹⁹ People were apparently already connecting Frances Howard with poison and murder, ideas which receive significant exposure in *The White Devil* when Vittoria's rival is poisoned and her husband murdered. It is difficult to speculate whether the larger public had heard whispers about Howard and Carr's romantic connection, but it is worth noting that subsequent gossip suggested that the Howard family were keen to promote their relative's attachment to the King's favourite, an advantageous match should it be achieved. If Webster was aware of and convinced by such rumours, then the composition of scene two certainly reflects the contemporary gossip. In this scene it is Flamineo, Vittoria's brother, who dominates as he strives to arrange assignations between his sister and the Duke by deceiving Vittoria's clueless husband.

A significant theme of the play is introduced when Flamineo provides other characters and the audience with an interpretation of the quiet Vittoria's conduct: 'Observed you not tonight, my honoured lord, / Which way so e'er you went she threw her eyes?' (I.2.11-12). This is a pattern that continues throughout, particularly in the scene depicting the first interaction between Vittoria and Brachiano. Here Brachiano gives Vittoria a jewel before she relates to him a dream she had concerning '[his] Duchess and [her] husband' (I.2.220) attacking a

²⁹⁹ *Report on the Manuscripts of the Marquess of Downshire*, ed. by E. K. Purnell and A. B. Hinds, II (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1936), p. 328.

yew tree in a churchyard. Fortunately for the audience, Flamineo is eavesdropping on the couple and again insists on interpreting Vittoria's meaning: 'She hath taught him in a dream / To make away his Duchess and her husband (I.2.239-40). He thus ascribes murderous intent to his sister.

There is no direct evidence that this is Vittoria's intention albeit critics such as David Lindley have been willing to accept that Vittoria is intentionally manipulating Brachiano. Rather, it is another instance in which a man 'interprets' a woman, creating an image or archetype of womanhood that may be comfortably categorised as, in this case, the seductive adulteress. Lisa-Jane Klotz agrees that it is only Flamineo's interpretation that incriminates Vittoria, noting further that 'both before and after the trial the reliability of judgments made by induction is interrogated through the depiction of characters secretly watching and/or listening as one character – either aware of the secret auditory or not – interacts with another' (Klotz, p. 124). Joy Leslie Gibson argues that this presentation of Vittoria was mandated by the limitations of the boy playing her: 'The eroticism in the scene where she is seduced by Brachiano (Act 1 scene ii) is produced more by the comments of onlookers than by the lovers themselves, who are almost ceremonial in their words and behaviour'.³⁰⁰ She contends that this is an example of how female characters were intentionally constructed so that boys could play them; the characters would also utilise stylised language and possess male attributes that the boys could convincingly convey. I disagree because the act of interpreting Vittoria recurs throughout the play, not merely in the erotic scenes,

³⁰⁰ Joy Leslie Gibson, *Squeaking Cleopatras: The Elizabethan Boy Player* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2000), p. 126.

and it mirrors the interpretation of female conduct that dominated many a church court trial. Brachiano is similarly inclined to interpret Vittoria's meaning: 'Sweetly shall I interpret this your dream' (I.2.241). He then states that he will 'seat [her] above law and above scandal' (I.2.245), thus indicating his power as a man to protect her by marrying her. In so doing, he has transformed her from adulteress to wife, a safe and respectable category of womanhood. Unfortunately, Vittoria is given no opportunity to comment on such an interpretation as her mother appears to berate her children. Vittoria's attempt to express herself is prevented, establishing the pattern that will be conducted more ruthlessly in the trial scene by her male inquisitor.

Act Two scene two is most notable for the appearance of Isabella, Brachiano's wife and Vittoria's foil. Her encounter with her estranged husband is a powerful representation of marital disunity, effecting what I contend is an emotional 'divorce' between the couple. After ceremoniously kissing Isabella's hand, Brachiano declares the following:

Your hand I'll kiss:

This is the latest ceremony of my love,

Henceforth I'll never lie with thee, by this,

This wedding ring: I'll ne'er more lie with thee.

And this divorce shall be as truly kept

As if the judge had doomed it: fare you well (II.1.192-7).

Isabella's protest is met with '[t]his is my vow' (201) and '[m]y vow is fixed' (205). This rejection has greater symbolic weight than has been previously

acknowledged. The terminology of ‘ceremony’ and ‘vow’ accentuate the formality of this moment, lending ritualistic weight to Brachiano’s repudiation of Isabella. Moreover, the seeming return of the wedding ring – or even just its use as a symbol upon which a vow may be based – has significant symbolic power. Diana O’Hara observes that marriage in this period ‘should be seen not purely as a legal act, but as a “social drama” where rituals and symbols, gifts and tokens, played a “dynamic and creative “ role in both its making and its breaking’.³⁰¹ Henry Swinburne’s treatise on the question of ‘spousals’, written before 1623, remarks that ‘*Subarration*, that is the giving and receiving of a *Ring*, is a Sign of all others, most usual in Spousals and Matrimonial Contracts’.³⁰² By swearing on the ring as he repudiates his marriage, Brachiano is participating in a system of ritualised actions that enact an unofficial but powerful separation between himself and his erstwhile wife. Isabella patently realises this, as evidenced by her subsequent comment that she must now pray for him ‘upon a woeful widowed bed’ (II.1.210); she obviously perceives herself as symbolically ‘divorced’ from Brachiano.

When Francisco interrupts the couple’s conference, Isabella takes her cue from Brachiano as she performs her assumed role of outraged wife intent on ending the marriage. Isabella is not officially on trial but she performs before her patriarch (brother) the dissolution of her marriage at her own request,

³⁰¹ Diana O’ Hara, *Courtship and Constraint: Rethinking the Making of Marriage in Tudor England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 64.

³⁰² Henry Swinburne, *A treatise of spousals* (London: 1686), p. 207/ Dd4r.

adopting the identity of ex-wife in order to protect her husband; she echoes Brachiano's kiss of her hand and his oath on his wedding ring:

Sir, let me borrow of you but one kiss.

[*Kisses* BRACHIANO]

Henceforth I'll never lie with you, by this,

This wedding-ring (II.1.252-4).

Francisco responds incredulously to this speech, so Isabella clarifies the matter further:

And this divorce shall be as truly kept

As if in thronged court a thousand ears

Had heard it, and a thousand lawyers' hands

Sealed to the separation (II.1.255-58).

Both the words 'divorce' and 'separation' signify the symbolic dissolution of the marriage, but Isabella's reference to the court reminds the audience that this is not a legally sanctioned split - as I described above, this would have been a far more complex if not impossible endeavour for an early modern man or woman to effect. The reason Webster includes this exchange is not to suggest that Brachiano and Isabella have achieved a literal 'divorce'; rather, it is symbolic of Brachiano's repudiation of Isabella in favour of Vittoria. He has no hope of wedding his paramour while Isabella is alive (otherwise why kill her?), but this ritualised ceremony of separation conveys his attachment to Vittoria and thus reiterates to the audience that his lover is not a mere whore but his 'sexual mistress' that he

intends to marry; indeed, it could also carry a shade of the 'betrothed mistress'. He had already revealed his intentions when he gave Vittoria a 'jewel' in an earlier scene, which was just the sort of 'marriage token' that early modern church courts were often presented with as evidence of betrothal.³⁰³

Displeased with his sister's distress, Francisco urges passivity on Isabella's behalf: 'Look upon other women, with what patience / They suffer these slight wrongs' (II.1.239-40). Such a meek, patient response is acceptable to early modern perceptions of femininity, fulfilling the popular archetype of Patient Griselda; Francisco thus tries to assign a positive social identity to his sister. Isabella resists this identity by articulating the inequity of women's position in a society that urges woman to accept their wrongs so passively: 'O that I were a man, or that I had power / To execute my apprehended wishes' (II.1.242-43). Her passionate critique of women's relative powerlessness will be echoed by her counterpart Vittoria in later scenes, and revealingly, both men who witness such passion will respond by assigning a new identity to such an unruly woman: that of 'Fury'. Francisco asks his sister if she has '[t]urned fury' (II.1.244) while Monticelso responds to Vittoria's anger over her sentence by informing the spectators that '[s]he's turned fury' (III.2.278). Francis Bacon used the same term in reference to Frances Howard when prosecuting Robert Carr, attributing Howard's hatred toward Overbury to the fact 'that he crossed her Love, and abused her Name, which are Furies in Women'.³⁰⁴ Whether in a court of law or the dramatic representation thereof, an upset or angry woman will be consistently

³⁰³ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p. 143.

³⁰⁴ Francis Bacon, *Baconiana* (London: 1679), p. 26/ C6v.

reduced to an unflattering classical archetype of monstrous femininity, much like the raped woman who seeks vengeance.

The trial scene overtly demonstrates the male ability to publicly destroy a woman's sexual and thus social reputation as a means to an end, comparable to the endeavours of Gonzago to publicly destroy Eulalia in *The Queen and Concubine*. Francisco initially praises the means by which Cardinal Monticelso has 'obtain[ed] the presence' of the resident ambassadors '[t]o hear Vittoria's trial' (III.1.1-3). Monticelso indicates that he - simultaneously judge and prosecutor in the best tradition of English church courts - cannot satisfactorily prove Vittoria guilty of murdering her husband:

For sir you know we have naught but circumstances

To charge her with, about her husband's death;

Their approbation therefore to the proofs

Of her black lust, shall make her infamous

To all our neighbouring kingdoms (III.1.4-8).

He blatantly acknowledges that he intends to publish Vittoria's sexual immorality far and wide, creating a social outcast who will be permanently categorised as a whore, and he is doing so because it is an efficient means of destroying her in a legal setting when one lacks the evidence to charge her with a specific crime.

Before I continue with a closer examination of the trial scene, it is worth noting that such courtly proceedings had intrinsic value for traditionally disenfranchised women simply because, unlike many other fora in early modern England, they required women to speak. Goldberg observes that 'defendants had

no weapons but their tongues, and a good deal depended on their ability to keep their wits about them and to summon up any knowledge they might have of legal procedure' (Goldberg, p. 45). The defamation suits that comprised much of the activity of church courts were primarily brought by women against other women, the result of which is that this particular legal institution was sometimes dominated by female voices who temporarily assume the traditionally masculine prerogative to assign other women their social identities or, alternately, resist them. Consequently, Vittoria seizes the opportunity to have her voice heard before an audience of ambassadors and the playhouse, refusing her enemies' attempts to assign her a specific sexual identity.

When Vittoria successfully objects to the use of Latin she achieves her first legal victory. She builds upon this foundation by implying that she is more educated than some of her audience, a bold claim for a woman to make before a group of male politicians:

FRANCISCO: Why you understand Latin.

VITTORIA: I do sir, but, amongst this auditory

Which come to hear my cause, the half or more

May be ignorant in't (III.2.14-17).

Her desire for plain language to be used also indicates that she, unlike her accusers, prefers the proceedings to be clearly comprehended by all, positioning herself as wronged innocent before a corrupt, secretive authority. Monticelso attempts to shame her in acquiescence, exclaiming 'O for God sake: gentlewoman, your credit / Shall be more famous by it' (III.2.22-3) but Vittoria remains defiant. She further remarks upon the falsity of Monticelso and the

inherent corruption of the court by alluding to the theatricality of the Cardinal's position: 'It doth not suit a reverend cardinal / To play the lawyer thus' (III.2.60-1). The trial so far has consisted of a tussle for control between the defendant and her inquisitor, indicating that Vittoria does not lack a degree of power in the courtroom as her voice must inevitably be heard.

Monticelso then finds his feet and eloquence in this setting, firstly by characterising Vittoria as a second Eve: 'Were there a second paradise to loose / This devil would betray it' (III.2.69-71). These lines depict Vittoria as a corrupting influence. Monticelso is assigning a specific identity to Vittoria which would be familiar and reassuring to early modern patriarchal society, categorising her as the fallen, seductive temptress. He continues with his most effective speech in which he explains the meaning of 'whore' to an incredulous Vittoria:

Shall I expound whore to you? Sure I shall;

I'll give their perfect character. They are first

Sweetmeats which rot the eater: in man's nostril

Poisoned perfumes. They are coz'ning alchemy,

Shipwrecks in calmest weather! What are whores? (III.2.79-83).

A masterpiece of misogynist rhetoric, the repetition of 'What's a whore' allows Monticelso to impose his own interpretation of this negative category of womanhood upon his audience. Throughout the speech he defines the term and thus every woman to whom he assigns this identity, demonstrating the power of men to define and categorise women. However, it is clearly an ideological usage meant to characterise the signified as immoral or socially poisonous, whereas the

actual understanding of the whore as an indiscriminate lover is a dubious appellation for Vittoria, who even denies her husband sex in favour of Brachiano.

Unsurprisingly Vittoria continues to resist this identity: 'This character escapes me' (III.2.102). The efficacy of Monticelso's attack versus Vittoria's resistance may be surmised from the reaction of the ambassadors. As critics like Klotz have observed, Monticelso intentionally 'procured' the ambassadors as an 'audience' to whom he can play when traducing Vittoria, transforming them into 'an informal panel of judges or a jury [...] which will simultaneously adjudicate the charges as being "true or good" and Vittoria guilty or not guilty of being an adulterer' (Klotz, pp. 127-8). Their interpretation of proceedings is therefore significant for the audience who share their position as spectators. The French ambassador remarks that Vittoria 'hath lived ill' (III.2.107), suggesting that Monticelso's rhetoric has had an effect; the English ambassador, whose shared national identity with the theatre audience meant that his view would carry considerable weight, responds 'True, but the cardinal's too bitter' (III.1.108). Evidently, Monticelso has not convinced his audience.

The next accusation levelled by Monticelso actually addresses the specific charges that Vittoria is facing, and does so in a manner that would be fairly familiar to an early modern audience: 'You know what whore is: next the devil, Adult'ry, / Enters the devil, Murder' (III.2.109-10). As the Cardinal informed Francisco at the beginning of the scene, he has no proof to implicate Vittoria in the murder of her husband; instead, he attempts to lambast his audience with rhetorical flourishes based upon moral casuistry – a woman capable of one social ill is capable of them all. This idea was not new and would soon receive a very public airing in the Overbury trials, as indicated by the Lord Chief Justice Sir

Edward Coke's alleged speech: 'Beware of Adultery, bewarre off taking away of other mens wives [...] A man shall seldome see an Adultery of as high degree indeed, but accompanieid with Murther'.³⁰⁵ As Lindley notes, the prosecutors during the Overbury trials had two primary purposes in conflating murder and adultery in their speeches regarding Frances Howard, the first being that adultery could help 'supply a motive' (Lindley, p. 168) for the poisoning of Overbury. The second purpose was 'to stir up a tide of moral condemnation' (Lindley, p. 168) and provide the curious public with a familiar stereotype of female villainy which would forever taint the reputation of the woman at the centre of the case (Lindley, p. 169).

The fact that Coke would later use a similar argument to Monticelso demonstrates that it was a familiar practice to identify a woman as capable of murder (and indeed likely to commit murder) should she prove capable of adultery, a judgement on 'unruly' women that could be applied in court or any patriarchal community. Both Monticelso and Coke make efforts to vilify the accused women in the public consciousness. Klotz effectively summarises Monticelso's flawed reasoning: 'If she is an adulterer, the reasoning goes, then she has the dishonesty and lack of scruples that would enable her to be involved in her husband's murder' (Klotz, p. 129). Once she is identified as a whore, Vittoria may now be considered capable of all social ills. Unlike Frances Howard, however, Vittoria never confesses to murder and never presents herself as a penitent. In refusing to adopt the posture of a submissive, repentant female who throws herself on the mercy of the court – the posture eventually adopted by

³⁰⁵ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Willis 58, fol. 224.

Howard – Vittoria refuses to accept guilt. In so doing, she resists being categorised as either an adulterous murderer or a penitent sinner.

In an effort to capitalise on his rhetorical effusions, Monticelso offers Vittoria's dress as proof for his assertions. Echoing Francisco's earlier interpretation of Vittoria's morality based upon her luxurious clothing,³⁰⁶ Monticelso asks his audience to similarly judge Vittoria's social conduct with reference to her attire, stating that '[s]he comes not like a widow' (III.2.121). However, Vittoria again rejects her accuser's attempt to 'interpret' her, declaring: 'Had I foreknown his death as you suggest, / I would have bespoke my mourning' (123-4). She continues by highlighting the injustice of this trial, rhetorically asking '[w]hat [...] is [her] just defence' (126) when she is to be judged by this impudent man? The Cardinal responds by attempting to arouse the court into a show of male authoritarian solidarity when she objects to courtly procedures: 'See my lords, / She scandals our proceedings' (III.2.129-30). Confronted with a woman who has consistently refused the social and sexual identity he has attempted to impose upon her, Monticelso appeals to the greater male community in an effort to enforce the misogynist category of unruly, adulterous whore upon Vittoria. Such an appeal could have an effect and further disempower a lone woman, so Vittoria makes a bold move.

Between lines 130-151 Vittoria she kneels before the ambassadors and, by extension, the audience in its entirety:

Humbly thus,

³⁰⁶ See II.1.54-5.

Thus low, to the most worthy and respected
Lieger ambassadors, my modesty
And womanhood I tender; but withal
So entangled in a cursed accusation
That my defence of force, like Perseus
Must personate masculine virtue to the point.
Find me but guilty, sever head from body:
We'll part good friends: I scorn to hold my life
At yours or any man's entreaty, sir (III.2.130-39).

Visually her posture would remind an audience of Shakespeare and Fletcher's Katherine when she kneels before masculine authority and humbly defends herself. This is the second evocation of Katherine in Webster's portrayal of Vittoria, the first being the latter's rejection of Latin, and he therefore encouraged the audience to recognise the commonalities between the two women.

In this speech Vittoria effortlessly adopts and incorporates various familiar social categories into which women were obliged to fit. By kneeling before the male authorities, she presents herself as a female penitent, submissively entreating the men to treat her kindly. She refers to her 'modesty', thus placing herself within the category of virtuous 'womanhood'. However, she continues by claiming that the 'cursed accusation' levelled against her has obliged her to 'personate masculine virtue', a transgression of traditional femininity but one that has been forced upon her by the Cardinal. In so doing she subtly suggests that male attempts to impose social identities on women – in this case Monticelso's

endeavours to impose the identity of ‘whore’ upon Vittoria – actually force women to transgress against traditional expectations of proper feminine behaviour. Rather than accept the category imposed upon her by men, she has been forced to usurp masculine qualities in the pursuit of some form of power, and in this context the power to own her own identity. In this moment she highlights the penalties of refusing to embrace the modern meaning of ‘mistress’, for if she were correctly identified as such then she might not have needed to usurp masculinity illegitimately as with many a ‘ruler’s mistress’.

The efficacy of Vittoria’s words is indicated by the English ambassador, who adopts a choric role in these proceedings and acts as an avatar for the audience when he observes that Vittoria ‘hath a brave spirit’ (III.2.140). She concludes her main address to the court with the assertion that Monticelso’s threats and accusations do not trouble her, for she is ‘past such needless palsy’ (III.2.148). Her next line, however, sufficiently encapsulates her entire attitude to her inquisitor’s endeavours to socially brand her:

for your names

Of Whore and Murd’ress, they proceed from you,

As if a man should spit against the wind,

The filth returns in’s face (III.2.148-51).

She thus overtly rejects the names and social identities that men attempt to assign to her. Nevertheless, this does not stop Monticelso, who produces a letter from Brachiano that he alleges incriminates Vittoria as an adulteress. Her response is characteristically intelligent and combative: ‘You read his hot love to me, but you want / My frosty answer’ (201-2). She continues by asking ‘Condemn you me for

that the Duke did love me' (203). Intriguingly, this disingenuous but not inaccurate claim reminds one of the 'courtly mistress', she who responds to literary effusions of love with coldness. Having witnessed the earlier scenes, an audience would recognise her insincerity here and thus Webster illustrates the current limitations of female sexual categorisation.

Vittoria provides an accurate summation of the prosecution's case:

Sum up my faults I pray, and you shall find

That beauty and gay clothes, a merry heart,

And a good stomach to feast, are all,

All the poor crimes that you can charge me with (III.2.207-10).

In a sense she is right, for the court has not adequately proven her complicity in murder nor that she has played the whore. However, she has committed an offence that she compounds in the trial: she cannot be comfortably encapsulated into pre-existing categories of womanhood and she refuses any man's attempts to categorise her. She would be better understood as Brachiano's 'mistress', the sexual partner of a man to whom she is not married.

Vittoria continues to object to the trial, explicitly revealing Monticelso's intention to destroy her reputation: 'it seems you have beggared me first / And now would fain undo me' (III.2.213-14). Frances Howard would later make a similar objection, according to the Ambassador of Florence, declaring to Coke that he has 'dishonoured [her] publicly' (Lindley, p. 174). It was not just in fiction that women recognised the function of the courtroom to act as a forum for men to name and shame troublesome women. Vittoria reiterates her objection to the

unjust procedures characteristic of church courts, and it is hard not to picture answering nods in the early modern playhouse.

The end of the trial is in sight when Monticelso asserts his masculine prerogative to ‘draw the curtain’ on Vittoria’s ‘picture’ (III.2.243); that is, he will present his own ‘picture’ of the accused to be judged:

MONTICELSO: You came from thence a most notorious strumpet,

And so you have continued.

VITTORIA: My lord.

MONTICELSO: Nay hear me,

You shall have time to prate (III.2.244-46).

Having spoken so effectively in the trial, seizing the rare opportunity it allows for a woman to express herself in public, Vittoria is again silenced. The Cardinal dismisses her powerful speech as ‘prate’, diminishing her in the eyes of the court. Monticelso sentences Vittoria to confinement ‘[u]nto a house of convertites’ (III.2.264), the meaning of which he is obliged to explain to Vittoria: ‘A house / Of penitent whores (III.2.266-67). This exchange allows Webster to reiterate the significance of identities that may be assigned, erroneously, to women: Vittoria herself has not been proven to be a whore, and certainly not a penitent one. Vittoria alludes to the ineffectiveness of such titles when she asks if ‘the noblemen in Rome / Erect it for their wives’ (267-68), then later demands that Monticelso repeat what she calls ‘your mitigating title’ (287) for this house. Like the woman it will soon house, the name given to the house and its inhabitants is imposed from above by male authority and is inadequate.

Before Vittoria is led off to her fate, Francisco interjects and urges her to ‘have patience’ as he did his sister. He achieves the same result, with Vittoria declaring ‘I must first have vengeance’ (III.2.270). Like Isabella, Vittoria refuses to accept the identity of patient, passive womanhood that would assuage male anxieties; rather, she insists upon a proactive role that is anathema to a patriarchal society, although she does subsequently lament that ‘woman’s poor revenge / [...] dwells but in the tongue’ (III.2.283-4). After she dismisses Francisco, Vittoria makes a powerful declaration about the injustice of the court proceedings and the sentence she has received:

VITTORIA: A rape, a rape!

MONTICELSO: How?

VITTORIA: Yes, you have ravished Justice,

Forced her to do your pleasure (III.2.273-75).

The first thing to note here is that, in this instance, a female pronoun is ascribed to something positive, and its use allows Vittoria to align herself with Justice as a fellow wronged woman. The main point, however, that Webster conveys in Vittoria’s cry ‘a rape’ is the notion that women are violated by a legal process that has male authorities – frequently biased authorities – determine or construct their sexual and social identities in a public setting. Vittoria never accepts the social identity foisted upon her by other characters, implicitly clinging to her own identity as ‘mistress’ in its modern meaning which so few recognise.

I will conclude this section of the chapter with a brief analysis of two other scenes from Webster’s play, in which the playwright either confirms or elaborates on the impressions he evoked in the court scene. In Act Four scene

two, Brachiano refers to the woman he intended to make his duchess as ‘this whore’ (IV.2.46), and when he confronts Vittoria with the supposed evidence of her deceit (a false letter from Francisco) he employs similar tactics to Monticelso in the earlier scene:

You need no comment, I am grown your receiver;

God’s precious, you shall be a brave great lady,

A stately and advanced whore (IV.2.70-2).

Like the Cardinal, Brachiano assigns the identity of whore to Vittoria and insists that no response from her is necessary; this theme of preventing Vittoria’s speech is reiterated at the conclusion of this scene when, on the advice of Flamineo, he ‘[s]top[s] her mouth / With a sweet kiss’ (IV.2.187-8). When Brachiano declares that ‘all the world speaks ill of [Vittoria]’ (IV.2.98), the woman is finally given the space to refute the world’s characterisation of her: ‘I’ll live so now I’ll make that world recant / And change her speeches’ (IV.2.98-100). She thus rejects the identity assigned to her by the world.

The denouement of the play has Vittoria make a dramatic final stand against male endeavours to categorise her as a whore. Ludovico addresses her as ‘glorious strumpet’ (V.6.202), but Vittoria’s response to impending death baffles those come to assassinate her:

GASPARO: Are you so brave?

VITTORIA: Yes, I shall welcome death

As princes do some great ambassadors:

I’ll meet thy weapon halfway.

LUDOVICO:

Thou dost tremble-

Methinks fear should dissolve thee into air.

VITTORIA: O thou art deceived, I am too true a woman (V.6.215-19).

Firstly, her courage is not expected by a man who has been informed that he was facing a mere whore; secondly, Vittoria characterises herself as akin to ‘princes’, rejecting the inferiority that inevitably accompanied the identity of whore. Most significant, however, is her response to Ludovico, who unlike Gasparo seemingly deludes himself into perceiving Vittoria shake with fear, a typically craven response from a fallen woman faced with death.³⁰⁷ This is her final stand before the killing blow is delivered, and it is here that she claims the identity of ‘too true a woman’. As a social identity it is vague, yet I contend that it is apposite for a woman who has spent the majority of her time onstage resisting the rigid female classification system preferred by anxiety-ridden men.

Vittoria is of higher social status than the average suspected adulteress brought before the early modern courts; she is therefore expected to demonstrate greater passivity than her lower-class contemporaries if she is to retain a vestige of social approval. Furthermore, her accusers are doubly emboldened by their sex and social superiority. In most other respects, however, *The White Devil* portrays a woman enduring the kind of persecution endured by English women who engage in extra-marital sexual relations. Despite this, Vittoria challenges every attempt of Monticelso and Francisco to characterise her as an adulterous whore or, more specifically, to vilify her. This pattern of behaviour reflects the ambivalence that has been introduced into the understanding of the ‘mistress’ in

³⁰⁷ Of course, this will be an issue in performance. The text does not clarify.

performance as demonstrated in the previous chapter; this ambivalence is in itself a development of the illegitimacy that haunted a 'ruler's mistress'. Webster therefore establishes Vittoria as a 'mistress' in its modern meaning performatively, but he is confident enough to have the Conjuror identify her as 'mistress' specifically. Erroneously categorised as a 'whore' by the patriarchal authorities in court, Vittoria exploits the opportunities for performance during a trial to refute this social identity, and Webster's sympathetic portrayal of her legal struggle – as evidenced by the ambassadors' comments and her accusers' corruption – encourages an audience to recognise the inadequacy of the established system of sexual categorisation.

5. *The Spanish Curate* by John Fletcher and Philip Massinger

In my analysis of this play I will reveal the relative ease with which men may assert their prerogative to assign social identities to women in a trial setting, in particular bandying about the title of 'wife' with almost negligent confidence that highlights the flexibility and inadequacy of the simplistic system of sexual categorisation applied to women in the early modern period. As before, I will provide a chronological close reading of the text and I will again examine the partisanship of this trial. However, I will also explore how the playwrights depict the vulnerability of women to male efforts to impose specific sexual identities upon them, while also showing female resistance to sexual categorisation that disadvantages them. Whereas Vittoria actively resisted male efforts both to vilify her and to categorise her as a 'whore', the women under discussion in this play actively seize and reject specific sexual identities depending on whether or not it is to their advantage to do so. The modern meaning of 'mistress' is not explicitly

mentioned as it is in Webster's play, but Henrique's endeavours to assign the identity of 'wife' to either Jacinta or Violante inevitably transforms the other woman into an extra-marital sexual partner, which was the emerging modern meaning of 'mistress' that playwrights were establishing performatively. The play not only accentuates the injustice of the male prerogative to sexually categorise women according to their own desires and female resistance to such efforts; it also illustrates the dangers that this power has over specific institutions such as marriage. As Henrique chooses which of his sexual partners should be accorded the identity of wife and the other rendered a 'mistress' in its emerging modern meaning, the playwrights inevitably evoke a notorious marital trial in which an anglicised 'Henrique' similarly decided that he should unilaterally determine who was his legal wife. This is the trial of Henry VIII's marriage, to which *The Spanish Curate* frequently alludes and to which I will now direct my attention.

(a) The Influence of the Blackfriars Trial

'And if a man shall take his brother's wife it *is* an unclean thing: he hath uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless' (Leviticus 20:21).³⁰⁸ These words came to haunt King Henry VIII in the 1520s, who at the beginning of his reign had wed his late brother Arthur's wife, Catherine of Aragon. Although this union had produced the Princess Mary, the lack of surviving sons from this marriage seemingly convinced Henry that he had offended God with this union and must rectify the situation if he were to produce legitimate male heirs. An annulment of this 'false' marriage would, however, prove far more

³⁰⁸ *The Bible: Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha*, ed. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 147.

difficult than he envisioned when first he decided that only another wife would do. Catherine refused to retire gracefully from Henry's life and external political considerations meant that the Pope was disinclined to accommodate Henry's demands for the dissolution of his marriage. Consequently, the King of England organised a trial to assess the validity of his marital union, expecting a prompt judgement in his favour that would allow him to marry another woman and beget an heir. Thus commenced the trial at Blackfriars, dramatized in Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII*, which would divide the country and inspire debate as to what constituted a 'true' marriage.

The trial at Blackfriars occurred only after a secret trial at York Palace with only English clerics adjudicating was aborted. Henry's minister Cardinal Wolsey believed that such a proceeding required a papal representative.³⁰⁹ David Starkey comments that this 'appointment led to an obvious charge of bias, in that both judges were English bishops and took the King of England's shilling. Catherine and her supporters pressed this charge vigorously' (Starkey, p. 218). Catherine was justified in noting the partisan nature of the proceedings against her. However, she was not as vulnerable as some may have thought. International affairs obliged the Pope, and therefore Campeggio, to either seek a non-confrontational solution to the matter – such as persuading Catherine to enter a nunnery and thus leave the King free to remarry – or to delay proceedings in the hope that the situation would resolve itself. Catherine also received sizable support from the English people: 'The Queen's personal and legal fight, in such

³⁰⁹ David Starkey, *Six Wives: The Queens of Henry VIII* (London: Vintage, 2004), p. 218.

maddening contrast to the resigned behaviour the King had expected, was paralleled by her undiminished popularity with ‘ “the Islanders” ’.³¹⁰

Nevertheless, the stubbornness of the two parties meant that an amicable solution was impossible and that there must be a legal confrontation.

The Blackfriars trial commenced on 31 May 1529, and ‘[t]he procedure to establish the truth was to be inquisitorial’, meaning that ‘both King and Queen were summoned to answer questions’ (Fraser, p. 157). On the 21st June Henry spoke to the court, asking for its judgment concerning the validity of his marriage which had lately troubled his conscience. It was, however, Catherine’s appearance on the same day which captured the imagination of the ‘large crowd of spectators [who] witnessed the show, which had certainly never been paralleled in the history of “the Islanders”’ (Fraser, p. 158). Kneeling before her husband and King, she made an impassioned plea for him to spare her this humiliation and to acknowledge their marriage. In this speech she again asserts that her marriage to Henry’s brother Arthur was unconsummated, rendering it invalid and thus undercutting Henry’s supposed concerns about the prohibition laid out in Leviticus: ‘And whan ye had me at the ffirst (I take god to be my Iuge) I was a true mayed [without] touche of man / And whether it be true or no I put it to [your] concyence.’³¹¹ If Catherine’s marriage to Arthur was never consummated then she was never legally or spiritually his wife, meaning that Henry did not ‘[uncover] his brother’s nakedness’ when he married Catherine. After making this

³¹⁰ Antonia Fraser, *The Wives of Henry VIII* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 154.

³¹¹ George Cavendish, *The Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey*, ed. by Richard S. Sylvester, Early English Text Society (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 81.

speech Catherine left the court, which subsequently endeavoured to disprove her claim of non-consummation in an effort to provide Henry with the outcome he desired.

As Fraser observes, Catherine's powerful performance was observed by many, which meant that the early modern English public were exposed to this legal dispute regarding what constitutes marriage. Spectacular at the time, the significance of this trial grew as its ramifications shook the religious foundations of the country. The court was adjourned when Campeggio declared that only the Pope could make the final judgment over the King's 'Great Matter', thus recalling the case to Rome. Henry was livid, and this disappointment led him to seek alternative means by which he might dissolve his marriage. With the guidance of Thomas Cromwell, Henry established himself as the Supreme Head of the Church in England. The Pope was thus divested of his religious authority in England, meaning that Henry need no longer seek his approval in his efforts to annul his marriage to Catherine. The King appointed Thomas Cranmer as the new Archbishop of Canterbury and 'asked' him to conclude the Great Matter. Armed with Henry's license, Cranmer stepped, however improbably, into Wolsey's shoes and launched the third 'inquisition' into the marriage' (Starkey, p. 485). This time, as Starkey remarks, the King was determined to avoid what had occurred previously; that is, 'humiliation at the hands of the London crowd at the Blackfriars Trial. There must be no repetition, and Catherine must be given no opportunity to grandstand and milk sympathy' (Starkey, p. 486). Unsurprisingly, Cranmer found for the King, and Catherine was no longer the Queen of England but a Dowager Princess of Wales – not that she ever accepted the demotion.

The trial of Henry and Catherine's marriage occurred before the bewildered eyes of the early modern public at home and abroad, although it was the English people who were able to witness and assess the merits of the case. The trial brought the complexities of marriage formation to the forefront of the public consciousness, raising questions about what constituted a true or valid marriage and in what circumstances could that marriage be dissolved. Especially relevant to my analysis is how the woman's social classification can be dramatically altered by the convoluted proceedings of such a trial; if a woman's marriage to a man is subsequently deemed invalid, then she has effectively conducted an extra-marital relationship with a man which could confine her to the category of unchaste women. Furthermore, when the proceedings of these courts are disputed by participants and spectators, then the social and sexual identity of the subsequent wife is threatened. Anne Boleyn certainly suffered a dubious social identity as a consequence of the controversial annulment of Henry's marriage to Catherine, and similar confusion is evident in *The Spanish Curate* in which two different women lay claim to the title of wife despite the judgement of a partisan court. Although it predates the period under discussion in my thesis by several decades, the legal examination of Henry and Catherine's marriage had ramifications that directly affected the early modern audiences of the 1620s: not only was it a precipitating factor in England's break from Rome and subsequent embrace of Protestantism (a key element of English national identity in this era), it also paved the way for Anne Boleyn and her daughter with Henry VIII – Queen Elizabeth I, the popular monarch whose memory lingered long into the reign of the less-popular Stuart dynasty. As evidenced by Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII*, the Blackfriars trial remained within the people's cultural memory

long after the events transpired, and it is not surprising that its influence can be felt in plays beyond its specific depiction in Shakespeare and Fletcher's collaboration – not least, as I will show in this chapter, in a later play of Fletcher's, *The Spanish Curate*.

b) The Trial of Henrique's Marriage(s)

In *The Spanish Curate* two women's sexual and social identities fluctuate when a man claims a former marital contract with one when still ostensibly married to another. The resulting trial consists of efforts to prove the first marriage was valid so that the resulting child may be legitimised and inherit from the father. As I will demonstrate, there is no clear answer in the play as to who is the truly legitimate wife, with various characters making disingenuous or partisan assertions that rarely withstand scrutiny. Jacinta had engaged in a sexual relationship with Henrique under the promise of marriage, but it is doubtful whether he was sincere in his offer and it is doubtful whether she truly considered it a valid marriage contract, as I will demonstrate below. She could thus easily be perceived as his extra-marital sexual partner or 'mistress' in its modern meaning. Henrique's subsequent marriage to Violante is considered valid until he deems it advantageous to claim otherwise, and revealingly Violante never accepts that she has been deceived into adopting the unwitting role of Henrique's 'sexual mistress'. Only once she has revealed her murderous intentions towards him is she finally rejected by Henrique and expelled from society, and Jacinta is conveniently embraced by her now free lover – something he failed to do even when the court deemed their union a valid marriage. The result is that two

women, Jacinta and Violante, are alternately characterised as Henrique's wife or extra-marital sexual partner (thus occupying the social and cultural space of the 'mistress' in its modern meaning), depending on whether or not it suits the male authorities to do so.

Act One scene three first reveals Henrique and Violante's dissatisfaction that the former's brother remains heir to their fortune:

But this is the beginning, not the end

To me, of misery that against my will,

(Since Heaven denies us Issue of our owne)

Must leave the fruit of all my care and travell

To an unthankfull Brother that insults,

On my Calamity (I.3.18-23).³¹²

Violante is especially aggrieved that the wealth from her family will ultimately go to her brother-in-law (I.3.34-36). Having established the mutual irritation of these characters, Fletcher and Massinger then reveal to the audience - as Henrique does to his wife - that he has thought of a potential solution to their current predicament; however, both playwrights and character maintain a cryptic silence over just what they intend:

HENRIQUE:

Were I but confirmed,

³¹² John Fletcher and Philip Massinger, *The Spanish Curate*, ed. Robert Kean Turner, in *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, gen. ed. Fredson Bowers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), vol. x, pp. 293-424.

That you would take the meanes I use, with patience,
As I must practise it with my dishonour,
I could lay leuell with the earth his hopes
That soare above the clouds with expectation
To see me in my grave.

VIOLANTE: Effect but this,
And our revenge shall be to us a Son
That shall inherit for us (I.3.37-44).

In this manner Henrique obtains his wife's blind agreement to his machinations. This will later become significant, as several characters will blame Violante for the subsequent events in the play but this moment establishes that that is a fallacy – she has no idea what he intends.

Don Henrique's plan is not revealed until Act Three, during which time the mutual antipathy between the brothers is established and several supporting characters are introduced. These characters are brought together by a courtly summons, and Jacinta's ruminations about the reason for her family's presence in the courtroom discloses their vulnerability to the machinations of the powerful:

I am confident
There is no man so covetous, that desires
To ravish our wants from us, and lesse hope
There can be so much Justice left on earth,

(Though sude, and call'd upon) to ease us of

The burthen of our wrongs (III.3.10-15).

This speech introduces several important themes that will be expanded upon as the play continues. Firstly, Jacinta's use of the word 'ravish' establishes the notion of judicial 'rape', the abuse to which the vulnerable – particularly women – may be susceptible, much like Vittoria in *The White Devil*. Moreover, the speech indicates that the family have suffered injustice in the past, which will soon become clear to the audience in the course of the trial.

Another comparison to *The White Devil* may be made through the playwrights' respective portrayals of lawyers in the courtroom. Although Bartolus does not compare to Monticelso in terms of the latter's malice, the exchange between him and Jamie hints at a corruption that does not bode well for the case about to commence:

BARTOLUS: My Lord, you are not lawlesse.

JAMIE: Nor thou honest;

[...]

but since you turn'd Rascall –

BARTOLUS: Good words, my Lord.

JAMIE: And grew my Brothers Bawd

In all his vitious courses (III.3.31-42).

Bartolus is appearing in this court as Henrique's advocate and will help present his case to the Assistant, who is acting as judge. The latter clarifies that Henrique has initiated a 'suit' (III.3.60), thus differentiating these proceedings from those in

Webster's play in which a church official brings a case to court ostensibly for the public good. The audience would thus become aware that Henrique's suit may well pertain to his inheritance problem, a solution to which he seeks in the courtroom much as Henry VIII did. Indeed, the subsequent proceedings of this case greatly resemble King Henry's 'Great Matter', as Bartolus reveals when he addresses the court:

This Lord (my Client)

Whose honest cause, when 'tis related truly,

Will challenge Justice, finding in his Conscience

A tender scruple of a fault long since

By him committed (III.3.75-9).

What Henrique and Bartolus will subsequently reveal is that the former, in lust with Jacinta, had promised her marriage before seducing her. The product of their liaison was Ascanio, who Henrique now intends to legitimise by establishing that he had entered into a marriage contract with his mother before he wed Violante.

Although not a direct reflection of Henry VIII's early marital troubles, considerable similarities may be drawn between that famous early modern trial and the court proceedings in *The Spanish Curate*. Henrique's case is based upon his contention that there existed an early legitimate marriage between two people that has remained unacknowledged and which negatively affected matters of filial inheritance; much the same applied to Henry VIII, who supposedly believed that his current succession woes were a consequence of Catherine's legitimate marriage to his brother Arthur. If she consummated her marriage with Prince

Arthur, then she was Arthur's lawful wife, making it contrary to the law of God (as laid out in Leviticus) for her to later wed Henry. Furthermore, Bartolus's phrase 'finding in his Conscience / A tender scruple of a fault' echoes the words placed in Henry VIII's mouth by George Cavendish in his *Life of Wolsey*: 'I wyll declare vnto you thespecyall cause that moved me herevnto / yt was a certyn Scripulositie that prykked my coneyence vppon dyuers wordes that ware spoken at a certyn tyme by the Bysshope of Biean' (Cavendish, p. 83). Several chroniclers used similar wording when discussing Henry VIII, including John Slaydan who recorded that Henry 'propoundeth this scrupulositie of his conscience, to certen byshoppes, and calleth in question[n], whether it were lawfull to marrye his brothers wyfe'(Slaydan, fol. 114^v). The latter account in particular would certainly have been available to the larger English population, as would the various other chronicles circulating among the early modern public, so the playwrights' use of this language is intentional. This is further demonstrated by Fletcher and Massinger's conscious echo of an earlier Fletcher collaboration: *Henry VIII*. The playwrights overtly reference Fletcher's work with Shakespeare in which the eponymous King declares in court how his 'conscience first received a tenderness / Scruple and prick' (*Henry VIII*, II.4.167-80). The similar wording evokes not only the actual Blackfriars trial as recorded by Cavendish but also the earlier Shakespeare and Fletcher play, and it therefore encourages the comparison between Henrique and Henry VIII. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, the integrity of Henry's supposed 'conscience' is consistently undermined by other characters; by reminding the audience of Henry's flexible conscience in *Henry VIII*, Fletcher and Massinger signify that their Henrique's conscience is similarly corruptible. Ultimately, the audience is aware that Henrique's supposed scruples

of conscience are most likely nothing of the sort; rather, this entire case is an attempt to circumvent the laws of primogeniture. Even if his claim could be proved true, the bitterness expressed by the older brother in his first scene undermines his integrity in the courtroom.

As the trial scene develops, Bartolus continues his address to the court by elaborating on the methods with which Henrique seduced Jacinta:

And us'd all means
Of Service, Courtship, Presents, that might win her
To be at his devotion: but in vain;
Her Maiden Fort, impregnable held out
Untill he promis'd Marriage; and before
These Witnesses a solemne Contract pass'd
To take her as his Wife (III.3.88-94).

The playwrights thus cast Henrique in the role of a duplicitous seducer, the type of man who was frequently brought before the church courts by the women they had deceived and, potentially, ruined. This speech is reminiscent of many a case brought before the ecclesiastical authorities concerning marriage formation and its confusing intricacies, especially when one also considers the interpretive minefield of gifts between lovers which perplexed many a layman and judge. Much like the plaintiff in a marriage trial, Henrique professes to have witnesses who can attest to the existence of a marriage contract between himself and Jacinta, although Jamie quite rightly questions their integrity: 'They are incompetent Witnesses, his own Creatures, / And will sweare any thing for halfe a

royall' (III.3.95-6). Bartolus then describes the aftermath of Jacinta's seduction in a manner that casts further doubt on Henrique's vaunted conscience:

Upon this strong assurance
He did enjoy his wishes to the full,
Which satisfied, and then with eyes of Judgement
(Hood winck'd with lust before) considering duly
The inequality of the Match, he being
Nobly descended, and allyed, but she
Without a name, or Family, secretly
He purchas'd a Divorce, to disanull
His former Contract, marrying openly
The Lady *Violante* (III.3.97-106)

Evidently Jacinta was insufficiently noble to become Henrique's wife, and the latter was sufficiently aristocratic and wealthy to purchase 'a Divorce'. It is not clear what exactly is meant by 'divorce' in this context, for there is no cause for him to end his alleged 'marriage' and no official, legal means to do so; the easiest method would be simply to deny the existence of any form of contract. All it suggests to an audience is that Henrique manipulated the judicial system to wriggle out of honouring his promise to Jacinta. Such blatant corruption of the judicial process in the past will not convince an audience of his integrity now.

Notably, even though Henrique (through Bartolus) is claiming that he had contracted himself to Jacinta in way of marriage, the phrase 'strong assurance' does not suggest the irrevocable bonds of matrimony; instead it appears to

characterise an insincere ‘promise’ to wed that would be subsequently denied in a courtroom. I contend that the playwrights are establishing the fundamental ambiguity that engulfs this case, a claim of matrimony that many accept yet which never appears convincing. This impression is exacerbated by the use of the term ‘disannul’: although this word shares the same general meaning as ‘annul’ (the *Oxford English Dictionary* prefers the definition ‘to cancel [...] to abolish’ or ‘[t]o deprive by the annulment of one’s title’), the prefix ‘dis’ serves to undermine the meaning that Bartolus intends to convey, almost appearing to negate it.³¹³ This suggests the disingenuousness of the case as presented by Henrique and Bartolus, or at least the intentions behind it, thus further shrouding the supposed legitimacy of Jacinta and Henrique’s marriage in layers of ambiguity.

It was now time for Jacinta to respond to his claims, and she begins by asking permission of the judge to speak:

Grant to a much wrong’d Widow, or a Wife

Your patience, with liberty to speake

In her own Cause (III.3.110-12).

This speech accentuates the ambivalence that surrounds female sexual identities. It echoes Isabella’s confrontation with Brachiano in *The White Devil* during which she also identifies herself as a widow once her husband rejects her. However, both women subsequently seize another identity during their respective ‘trials’ when it benefits them. In Isabella’s case, she protects her estranged husband from the wrath of her brother; in Jacinta’s, she endeavours to maintain

³¹³ ‘Disannul’, *Oxford English Dictionary* <http://www.oed.com> [accessed 3 July 2016].

custody of her son. This pattern reveals a female willingness to lie to authority by assuming stereotyped sexual identities when it advantages them or those they love; these efforts to manipulate the system of male categorisation of women reveals their fundamental contempt for the process and resistance to its imposition from the top down.

Using Bartolus as his conduit, Henrique has categorised Jacinta as his legitimate wife; she may not reject this social identity, but she resists having a man unilaterally determine her position in society without having her say. She proceeds to confirm Henrique's account:

I dare not deny,

For Innocence cannot justifie what's false)

But all the Advocate hath alleadged concerning

His falshood, and my shame, in my consent,

To be most true (III.3.118-22).

However, although Henrique's account seemingly legitimises their relationship as a marriage, Jacinta evidently considers her consent to sexual relations with her supposed husband shameful. This suggests that Jacinta does not entirely believe that their agreement was a true marital contract, rendering her a discarded 'mistress' in its modern meaning rather than an abandoned wife. Moreover, her claim that she 'cannot justifie what's false' will be undermined when she intentionally deceives in an effort to maintain custody of Ascanio; she is perfectly willing to seize another social identity should it advantage her.

She continues by directly addressing the man who has brought her before the court:

But now I turne to thee,
To thee *Don Henrique*, and if impious Acts
Have left thee blood enough to make a blush,
I'll paint it on thy cheekes. Was not the wrong
Sufficient, to defeat me of mine honour,
To leave me full of sorrow, as of want,
The witnessse of thy lust, left in my womb,
To testifie thy falshood, and my shame? (III.3.122-9).

In this moment Fletcher and Massinger again evoke the staging of *Henry VIII*'s trial scene and the Blackfriars trial on which it is based. In both plays and the historical account, the woman whose sexual behaviour is being analysed by the court turns away from the officials and directly faces the man who has brought the case to court: her 'husband'. Jacinta then claims that her current marriage to Octavio was arranged to conceal Henrique's 'most inhumane wickednesse' (III.3.131) and '[t]o Father what was [his]' (III.3.133), before both she and Octavio swear that they never consummated their marriage:

JACINTA: (for yet by heaven,
Though in the City, he pas'd for my husband,
He never knew me as his wife, –
ASSISTANT: 'Tis strange:

Give him an Oath.

OCTAVIO: I gladly sweare, and truly (III.3.133-6).

This conduct suggests Jacinta perceived her union with Henrique to have been a legitimate marriage (a fact contradicted by her expressed shame that she consummated that legitimate marriage) which explains her refusal to consummate what would inevitably be a sham marriage with Octavio. Ultimately, the playwrights leave the audience confused regarding the marital and sexual status of Jacinta, reflecting the confusion of early modern systems of sexual classification that have failed to recognise evolving definitions of certain signifiers.

The second part of Jacinta's address is a powerful piece of self-expression:

After all this (I say) when I had borne

These wrongs, with Saint-like patience, saw another

Freely enjoy, what was (in Justice) mine,

Yet still so tender of thy rest, and quiet,

I never would divulge it, to disturb

Thy peace at home (III.3.137-142).

Comparing herself to a saint evinces some effort toward resisting Henrique's attempts to assign her the social and sexual identity of wife. Although she agrees with his assessment of their relationship she does not explicitly characterise herself as an abandoned wife, implicitly rejecting the concept by likening herself to a saint, a comparison she repeats when she refers to her 'Saint-like patience' (III.3.138). She later undermines this characterisation of herself by lamenting how her shame has been publicly revealed:

in open Court

To publish my disgrace, and on record,

To write me up an easie-yeilding [sic] wanton (III.3.145-7).

Again, her supposed faith in the legitimacy of her marriage to Henrique is undermined by her inexplicable shame – inexplicable, that is, unless one considers that she is unconvinced about the legitimacy of her marriage. Such an ambivalent reaction suggests that, despite her words, she is not entirely convinced that her marriage to Henrique is or was legitimate and so would prefer the details thereof to be secret lest she be revealed as a ‘sexual mistress’. This impression is confirmed by her use of the phrase ‘easie-yeilding wanton’, a sexual identity that she evidently thinks is being publicly assigned to her in open court despite the seeming agreement between the parties about the legitimacy of their marriage. Obviously her identity as either Octavio’s or Henrique’s wife is not secure, and in this moment of epistemological uncertainty she turns to an identity about which she may be certain: that of mother. Jacinta thus proceeds to give a convoluted summation of her and Ascanio’s position in relation to Henrique:

One comfort yet is left, that though the Law

Divorc’d me from thy bed, and made free way

To the unjust embraces of an other,

I cannot yet deny that this thy Son

[...]

Is thy legitimate heire (III.3.147-154).

She maintains her social identity as a mother in the face of ambivalence regarding her sexual conduct; this also reveals her potential motivation for agreeing that she was legally married to Henrique – as a bid to protect the splendid inheritance that now awaited Ascanio. This consideration, more than any other, explains Jacinta's lack of resistance to these initial efforts of identification; in this respect she is the inverse of Catherine of Aragon who clung to the legitimacy of her second marriage as a means to maintain her daughter's inheritance as Queen of England.

Jacinta is the first to address the elephant in the room that the other characters entirely neglect: if Jacinta is his lawful wife, what does that make Violante? She expresses some latent jealousy over Henrique's relationship with Violante, implying that the latter has essentially usurped the role that should be hers and only her continued affection for Henrique prevented her from asserting her matrimonial rights:

After all this (I say) when I had borne

These wrongs, with Saint-like patience, saw another

Freely enjoy, what was (in Justice) mine (III.3.137-9).

In so doing, she and the playwrights signify to the audience that despite the ambivalence she evinces regarding her own marital status, the audience should perceive Violante as an archetypal 'ruler's mistress' who has usurped the prerogatives of a wife.³¹⁴

³¹⁴ Although not a literal ruler, Henrique's position as head of the household positions him as ruler of that particular domain, a microcosm of the patriarchal state.

At this point in the scene Jamie interjects with another opinion about the legal proceedings that directly affect him: ‘Confederacie: / A trick (my Lord) to cheat me’ (154-5). He demands to be heard, astutely noting that this legal action was instituted as a means to prevent Jamie from inheriting his brother’s fortune:

And this forg’d by the Advocate, to defeat me

Of what the Lawes of *Spaine*, confer upon me,

A meere Imposture, and conspiracie

Against my future fortunes (III.3.159-62).

This prompts Henrique to finally address the court in person, explicitly denying Jamie’s assertions:

I confesse,

(Though the acknowledgement must wound mine honour)

That al the court hath heard touching this Cause,

Or with me, or against me, is most true,

The later part my Brother urg’d, excepted:

For what I doe, is not out of Spleene

(As he pretends) but from remorse of conscience

And to repaire the worng I have done

To this poore woman (III.3.163-71).

Considering Henrique’s earlier diatribe against his brother, this claim that he does not act out of spleen is unconvincing and undermines the validity of his case. This

is exacerbated when his intentions to remedy the ‘wrong’ done to Jacinta are disclosed:

By prooffe, this is my Son, I challenge him,

Accept him, and acknowledge him, and desire

By definitive Sentence of the Court,

He may be so recorded, and full power

To me, to take him home (III.3.175-9).

His reparation for the ‘wrong’ done to Jacinta is to acknowledge their son and make him his heir, hence satisfying his malicious desire to disinherit Jamie; he makes no mention of the woman to whom he claims he is married. One could argue that he genuinely believed that the ‘divorce’ he purchased had ended his legitimate marriage to Jacinta, thus legitimising Ascanio’s conception while maintaining that the marriage is over. This argument fails, however, when one considers the means by which a marriage may be ended in early modern England: an annulment would have allowed Henrique to remarry but would have bastardised Ascanio, while an official separation ‘from bed and board’ would have allowed their child to retain his legitimacy but would have prevented Henrique’s remarriage. Moreover, any separation between Henrique and Jacinta would have to have been predicated on her adultery or his intolerable cruelty, and as neither condition had been met then Henrique must have located a singularly corrupt judge to allow him unilaterally to end their marriage. Henrique must consequently be aware that his union to Jacinta is still binding. These facts considered, the only way that Henrique can claim Ascanio as a legitimate heir is to acknowledge Jacinta as his wife and re-assemble the family unit. The fact that

he chooses not to do so, and that the court allows him, indicates that his case is fundamentally flawed, the legal system corrupt, and Jacinta's sexual identity fluctuating depending on the desires of male authorities.

By acknowledging and seizing control of his son, Henrique asserts his power as a father in his community. A child was only considered legitimate if the father acknowledged it; else it was the mother's bastard and its upkeep was to be maintained by her alone or the parish. In acknowledging Ascanio, Henrique is again asserting his patriarchal prerogative to assign identities to others, although this time it is directed toward his child. Jacinta, meanwhile, is left in the curiously anomalous position of both acknowledged wife and discarded 'sexual mistress', fitting into neither category because of Henrique's bizarre conduct. Furthermore, she has been deprived of her son, a key signifier of her identity as a mother. This social dislocation is achieved by Henrique's selfish efforts to categorise her as it pleased him, allowing her sexual conduct to be picked apart in public in an effort to safely and conveniently categorise her as 'wife'. Such behaviour was similarly endured by Vittoria in *The White Devil*, with both women subjected to other men's interpretations of their social identity before being disposed of as it pleased those men in power. Therefore, Jacinta responds in the same way as her 'Websterian' counterpart: 'A second rape / To the poore remnant of Content, that's left me (III.3.179-80). While I am not claiming that *The White Devil* is a direct source for *The Spanish Curate*, the plays' shared use of the word 'rape' by the two legally-examined women conveys the powerlessness both women experience during their respective trials. Jacinta's words not only echo Vittoria's exclamation that her inquisitor has committed 'a rape', but also Jacinta's own speech at the beginning of the trial where she expresses her confidence that no

one would seek to 'ravish' her of the few comforts she has. The male prerogative to shape a woman's social identity as he sees fit is thus characterised in both plays as an act of sexual violation, an undermining of woman's selfhood that is achieved using the courtroom.

The only effective response that Jacinta can now make is to resist their social identification of her as a wife, refusing the convenient categorisation of her that had been attempted throughout the trial and consequently disempowered her:

rather than part

With my *Ascanio*, I'll deny my oath,

Professe my self a Strumpet, and endure

What punishment soe're the Court decrees

Against a wretch that hath forsworne her selfe,

Or plai'd the impudent whore (III.3.183-8).

She uses the word 'whore', which is inadequate as she has not been sexually indiscriminate in the way that a whore was understood in early modern England; her sexual behaviour is characteristic of a 'mistress' in its modern sense. Her protest here is a powerful effort to reclaim her identity as something other than wife when it is to her advantage to do so, demonstrating resistance to inadequate male efforts to identify her sexually for their own convenience. Jacinta empowers herself within a courtly setting by unwittingly claiming a sexual identity that the theatre was engaged in creating performatively, that of the 'mistress' in her modern meaning.

Unsurprisingly, the Assistant is unmoved by Jacinta's pleas and dismisses them with '[t]his tastes of passion' (188), a judgement inspired by early modern perceptions of gender difference: as I noted in Chapter Two, 'passion' was considered a feminine quality in the early modern period, which if possessed by a ruler in excess would render him effeminate. In a public institution like a court, in which men of reason naturally dominate, 'passion' and the 'unreason' it denotes is characteristic of women and must be ignored. He continues:

Don Henrique, take your Son, with this Condition

You give him maintenance, as becomes his birth,

And 'twill stand with your honour to doe something

For this wronged woman: I will compel nothing,

But leave it to your will (III.3.190-4).

The repeated use of 'will' is suggestive, its sexual connotation reminding the audience that a woman's sexual identity is socially determined by a man; moreover, it accentuates the sexuality of Jacinta and Henrique's relationship and thus indicates that this is the essential element in their association rather than a legitimate, sanctified marriage. Significantly, Ascanio is now identified as solely Henrique's son, not Jacinta's or their shared progeny. In addition to this, Jacinta is referred to as 'this wronged woman', not 'mother' – another identity of which she has been deprived. The Assistant then leaves it to Henrique to decide if he will provide his supposed 'wife' – who he has already abandoned, shamed, and from whom he has seized her son - with some form of maintenance. Henrique subsequently provides her with 'money' and orders her away:

Take that and leave us,

Gives money to Jacinta.

Leave us without reply (III.3.118-9).

His last words to her in this scene are an order for her not to speak – yet another echo of *The White Devil*, in which the woman who has challenged a man's endeavours to assign her a specific social identity is prevented from talking.

With Jacinta silenced and the trial complete, it remains for the audience to see how Violante will respond to events. Unsurprisingly, she is unhappy that her fortune is now to be inherited by her husband's child with another woman. However, she is not threatened by the legal proceedings that have left her in an anomalous social position that could be characterised as bigamous second wife or long-term 'sexual mistress':

Was't not enough you took me to your bed,

Tir'd with loose dalliance, and with emptie veines,

All those abilities spent before and wasted,

That could conferre the name of mother on me?

But that (to perfect my account of sorrow

For my long barrennesse) you must highten it

By shewing to my face, that you were fruitfull

Hug'd in the base embraces of another?

[...]

What end of my vexation to behold

A bastard to upbraid me with my wants (IV.1.8-19).

By identifying Ascanio as a bastard she is denying his legitimacy and therefore the legitimacy of Henrique's relationship with Jacinta; as far as she is concerned, Jacinta is a discarded 'mistress' in its modern meaning, a 'loose dalliance' and 'base' woman.

Confronted with Violante's wrath, Henrique capitulates:

HENRIQUE: What can I say?

Shall I confesse my fault and ask your pardon?

Will that content ye?

VIOLANTE:

If it could make void,

What is confirm'd in Court: No, no, *Don Henrique*,

You shall know that I find my self abus'd,

And adde to that I have a womans anger (IV.1.21-6).

It is worth noting that when endeavouring to assuage Violante's anger, Ascanio highlights the continued ambiguity concerning the social identities of both Jacinta and Violante:

ASCANIO: [I] hope to gaine a fortune by my service,
With your good favour: which now, as a Son,
I dare not challenge.

VIOLANTE: As a Son?

ASCANIO: Forgive me,
I will forget the name, let it be death
For me to call you Mother (IV.1.47-51).

Even though Ascanio only utilises the terms ‘son’ and ‘mother’ figuratively to signify his respect for his ‘stepmother’, he unwittingly conflates both apparent ‘wives’ of Henrique with those words. He therefore highlights the ambivalence with which many playwrights depicted the ‘mistress’, conflating two (potential) mistresses into one mother in a manner that resembles the process of conflation that, as I argued in a previous chapter, occurs in depictions of Anne Boleyn onstage and in non-dramatic literature.

Violante, however, rejects such terms and consequently the benign social identity which Ascanio suggests to her. She then makes her most significant symbolic gesture against Henrique and patriarchal prerogative:

VIOLANTE: Heare what I vow before the face of heaven,

 And if I breake it, all plagues in this life,

 And those that after death are fear’d, fall on me:

 While that this Bastard staies under my rooffe,

 Looke for no peace at home, for I renounce

 All Offices of a wife (IV.1.53-8).

Violante threatens to reject her social identity as ‘wife’ if she does not get her way - namely, the expulsion of the ‘bastard’ from her house. In such a manner does Violante not only evince her readiness to renounce her social identity and thus emerge as someone outside established female sexual categories, she actually uses the threat of such an action to achieve her designs - which in this case is the severing of a homosocial and filial bond. Henrique’s response is compromising:

How am I divided

Between the duties I owe as a Husband,

And pietie of a Parent? (IV.1.71-3).

Violante's stance has broken Henrique, so much so that his social identity is fracturing. Divided between his two duties as a paterfamilias, he eventually capitulates and sends Ascanio back to Jacinta. Nevertheless, he has revealed in this moment that he still considers Violante his wife, further undermining the claims he made in court.

It is significant that, even after the court proceedings, there is no consensus among the characters that witnessed the events about Jacinta and Violante's social identities. Octavio chides Jacinta over her sorrow and reminds her that Ascanio has been '[restored] [t]o his Birth-right, and the Honours he was borne to' (IV.4.14-5), indicating his continued belief in the validity of Jacinta and Henrique's marriage. Ascanio is similarly convinced, acerbically referring to Violante as '[t]he Lady, whom my father calls his wife' (IV.4.31). His comment is particularly illuminating, suggesting implicitly that Jacinta deserves the title of 'wife' now and that Violante has no claim to it; therefore, at least in his opinion, the marriage between his parents remains valid and Violante is nothing more than Henrique's 'sexual mistress'. The person with whom he is speaking is Jamie, who despite his sympathy for Ascanio does not appear to share this opinion. In Act Five scene one, Jamie refers to Violante as '[his] Brothers wife' (V.1.15). He does, however, have plenty to say to Violante, accusing her of having corrupted his brother and of encouraging him in his foolish behaviour. As one can see from

Act One scene three, such a characterisation is unfair: Henrique initiates the conversation about Jamie's inheritance and evidently loathes his brother from the outset, while his cruel treatment of Jacinta prior to the trial also occurred before Violante became his wife. However, Jamie is not alone in perceiving Violante as the primary antagonist of the piece, and she certainly emerges as the principal anarchic force once she considers herself betrayed by Henrique, as I will now explore.

Despite Ascanio's departure from her house, Violante remains humiliated and intent upon revenge. She decides to enlist Jamie as a co-conspirator, encouraging him to kill his brother and reclaim his inheritance with Violante as his wife. Jamie instead reveals her plans to Henrique, who is unconvinced until Violante (assured of Jamie's support) confronts her husband:

You Sir, that

Would have me mother Bastards, being unable

To honour me with one Child of mine owne,

That underneath my Roofe, kept your cast-Strumpet,

And out of my Revenues, would maintaine

Her riotous issue: Now you find what 'tis

To tempt a woman (V.3.75-81).

Despite her murderous impulses, Violante never compromises her sense of social identity. She is certain that Ascanio is a bastard and that Jacinta is Henrique's former 'sexual mistress'; she alone is his wife, but the trial meant that her social identity and position were threatened by Henrique's selfish endeavours to

categorise Jacinta as his legitimate spouse. When confronted with such social dislocation, Violante resists. In this final speech she reminds Henrique of the dangers a man faces when he ‘tempt[s] a woman’, explicitly identifying herself with all women injured by the male prerogative to sexually categorise them. In this instance she allies herself with Vittoria, who faces her death declaring that she is ‘too true a woman’ (*The White Devil*, V.6.219). Violante does not respond when, her schemes foiled, Jamie and Henrique discuss the following:

JAMIE:

Were it but possible

You could make satisfaction to this woman,

Our joyes were perfect.

HENRIQUE: [...]

I ne're was married

To this bad woman, though I doted on her,

But daily did deferre it, still expecting

When griefe would kill *Jacinta* (V.3.124-130).

Now that Violante will be sentenced to immurement in a nunnery, Henrique may make whatever disingenuous statements he likes about his marital condition. Unlike Alynda, Violante does not acquiesce to her supposed spouse's identification of her as other than a wife, nor does she embrace a social punishment like Brome's character. Instead, she continues in her resistance as patriarchal authorities assert their dominance.

Henrique's speech elucidates his final stance concerning the respective social identities of the women with whom he has been involved. He claims Violante was never his wife, and although never declared outright, the only conclusion left to the audience is that Violante's relationship to Henrique has been that of an extra marital sexual partner or 'mistress' of a married man. Whether or not the audience trusts this final assessment – and Henrique's dubious integrity makes the matter far from certain – it is definitely an overt assertion of the male prerogative to assign women their sexual and social identities. With the Assistant's approval, Henrique 'gladly' (V.3.132) takes possession of his 'wife' Jacinta and son; significantly, neither woman says anything when these decisions are made. Violante has one more line in which she expresses her continued defiance and disinterest in the patriarchal machinations that determine both her and Jacinta's future: 'Since I have miss'd my ends, / I scorne what can fall on me (V.3.147-8). The men will continue to assign social identities and attempt to categorise women at their convenience; in Jacinta's non-response and Violante's scorn, the glimmer of female resistance is not entirely extinguished.

Unlike in the case of Vittoria in *The White Devil*, it is difficult to say for certain that either Jacinta or Violante is a 'mistress' in the modern sense of the term – too much is dependent on Henrique's manifestly unreliable word. However, the trial of Henrique and Jacinta's marriage discloses the fundamental vulnerability of women's social identities when exposed to the court. Once Ascanio's parentage is revealed, Jacinta's social position depends on whether Henrique can adequately prove that his proffer of marriage prior to seduction was a legitimate contract; only his self-interested claim that such a contract did exist prevents Jacinta from slipping between recognised categories of woman and

assuming the identity of (former) 'sexual mistress'. The events of the courtroom comprise a formal negotiation of Jacinta's sexual and thus social identity, a negotiation to which she initially only contributes in order to support Henrique's assertion that she should be incorporated into a category of 'good' or 'safe' womanhood. The negotiation becomes more challenging once she realises the cost of the proceedings and consequently resists the social identity that Henrique, Bartolus and the Assistant determine to assign her. She instead claims the identity of 'sexual mistress' in an effort to maintain custody of her child. The unanticipated aftershock of these events is the effect it would have on Violante, whose own social identity would inevitably fluctuate depending on Jacinta's categorisation: if her marriage is rendered illegitimate by Henrique's prior union with Jacinta, then must she become his 'sexual mistress'? Henrique certainly believes so in the final scene. However, unlike her foil Violante resists any and all efforts of the male characters to reassign her identity, instead conducting her own negotiation with her husband in which she threatens to cast off her social categorisation as wife and thus abandon Henrique.

The playwrights therefore continually accentuate the ineffectiveness of social categorisation through Henrique's ambiguous behaviour and the failure of the courtroom to reach a satisfactory conclusion concerning Jacinta's marriage, and the primary failure of such a system of sexual categorisation is that it fails to embrace entirely the concept of a mistress in its emerging modern meaning. If it did, such an identity could have been assigned to either woman with far more accuracy than 'whore' or 'wife'. That identity, along with a recognisably modern understanding of the word associated with it, emerges gradually and performatively on the early modern stage.

6. Conclusion

This chapter is about resistance, building on the ambivalence about ‘mistresses’ in the modern meaning in the preceding chapter. No woman in either play is the hero, but one personally resists vilification while two others embrace ambivalence and exploit the opportunities that trials provide women seeking different identities. Such opportunities have been afforded certain women in the public sphere over the decades, and the dramatists’ allusions to real trials encourages the audience to recognise the wider significance of what is being portrayed. The plays differ in their presentation of this issue, but they share significant features: the resistance of the female characters to simplistic categorisation and the obvious corruption of the male characters who assert their patriarchal prerogative to assign the women their social identities. Most significantly for my analysis, both plays feature potential ‘mistress-figures’ – in their evolving modern meaning - at the centre of these legal disputes. Both plays respond to early modern legal proceedings, specifically the focus of the church courts on governing both sexual immorality and the formation of marriages respectively.

The trial is a process in which someone’s identity is legally, and socially, determined. During a trial a woman may refuse to fulfil her assigned role in the narrative, resisting the identity that a man attempts to assign her and thus his efforts to classify her as a specific ‘breed’ of woman. When a play depicts such a struggle then it depicts an overt negotiation of women’s sexual identities; consequently, it reveals the limitations of the pre-existing system of female sexual classification which does not recognise the evolving modern meaning of

‘mistress’. These trial scenes therefore not only demonstrate how terminology may be misused by society at large – as represented through powerful male characters – but also how women are increasingly able to resist inadequate or outdated terminology. The trial scenes in these plays underline the performative creation of the ‘mistress’ as we know her: it is on the early modern stage that her identity begins to be established.

CONCLUSION

My approach to the ‘mistress’ in her modern meaning began as an effort to locate her within early modern drama. Although many characters could be and are retroactively identified as ‘mistresses’ in the modern sense, there is often no explicit identification of the women as ‘mistresses’ within the plays; if there is, it is often difficult to disentangle the ‘mistress’ denoting an extra-marital sexual partner from her courtly incarnation. Nevertheless, the theatre’s frequent use of qualifiers to signify specific types of ‘mistresses’ reveal that the word was increasingly subject to definitional stress and that the courtly definition was increasingly utilised euphemistically. Other literature from this period shows similar efforts to extricate the modern meaning of ‘mistress’ from its more common usage in the context of ‘courtly love’, and it is evident that the modern meaning was emerging throughout the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. However, in 1638 *The Royal Master* features the following speech:

KING: I will not marry thee, that’s a thing too common;

But thou shalt be my mistress, a preferment

Above my first intention (*The Royal Master*, V.1).³¹⁵

Such a characterisation of the ‘mistress’ is not specifically qualified or clarified; it is just accepted as a term denoting a woman engaged in an extra-marital sexual relationship.

³¹⁵ James Shirley, *The Royal Master*, in *The Dramatic Works and Poems of James Shirley*, ed. by William Gifford and Alexander Dyce, 6 vols (London: John Murray, 1833), IV, pp. 101-88.

Explorations of consent and agency in rape narratives provide the ideal platform for transforming the passive but chaste 'courtly mistress' into the active but illegitimate 'sexual mistress'. The troubling agency evinced by such women is complicated by a fundamental social illegitimacy, considering their position outside the safe sexual confines of marriage. This illegitimacy is explored most effectively in dramas representing a 'ruler's mistress', as this character with no legitimate role or position within the corridors of power usurps the prerogatives of other established persons. Such usurpation is inherently destabilising and could result in the vilification of an 'illegitimate' woman who acts in such a socially-destructive manner; however, various dramatists complicate this portrayal by establishing an ambivalence about these characters best expressed through the evasive representations of England's most recent and most controversial 'royal mistress'. As a 'royal mistress' who evolved into a wife, mother, traitor and martyr within a few decades, Anne Boleyn was the ideal vehicle through which playwrights could develop the pattern of representation that established a 'ruler's mistress' as an usurping and illegitimate character, moving beyond techniques that portrayed the 'mistress' as fundamentally destabilising to a patriarchal community and instead characterised her as more of an ambivalent figure. Although this effect is largely achieved through evasive tactics, dramatists balance this strategy by allowing female characters occupying the cultural and social space of 'mistress' to resist overtly patriarchal efforts to categorise them sexually as something they are not; they do so through the medium of trials, a performance arena that provides an early modern woman with an audience she may convince or condemn and reveals the inadequacy of existing categories of womanhood that do not include the modern meaning of 'mistress'. This dramatic

setting not only draws attention to how the same process occurs within the wider community - as women resist male endeavours to categorise them for their convenience - it also valorises the theatre as a comparable dramatic forum in which female social and sexual identities can be created performatively.

Throughout the course of this thesis I have developed critical research into representations of gender and sexuality, especially in regard to power relations made equivocal by legally unrecognised social roles. I explore a complex negotiation of gender roles through the medium of the theatre and the interrelated historical context, illustrating how the theatre portrays the negotiation of male and female identities and behaviours in an 'illegitimate' or extra-marital relationship. Responding to both medieval and early modern research, I have disentangled the 'courtly mistress' in Petrarchan and Neoplatonic literary discourses and situated her on the early modern stage, analysing how the creative context of the theatre allowed the character to develop beyond simplistic notions of chastity and virtue into a more subversive but agential figure, one which was granted a voice and allowed to be a subject.

This thesis also contributes to the criticism concerning the intervention of women in politics. It specifically expands the field by analysing both political and humoral theories in the performative creation of the 'modern mistress', examining the specific prerogatives or roles of established figures within the early modern political arena which may be undermined or usurped. I pay explicit attention to dramatic representations of the vulnerability of patriarchal political and social structures that may be exploited by subversive womanhood and even overtly challenged in certain fora that allow for public female speech. My research provides a detailed analysis of the literary and performative strategies that created

representations of Anne Boleyn in both dramatic and non-dramatic literature, exploring the ambivalence that characterised representations of the erstwhile ‘ruler’s mistress’. Finally, I contribute an understanding of the theatre’s engagement with the social anxiety thus generated by female sexual assertiveness, specifically demonstrating how the performative creation of the ‘modern mistress’ encapsulated much of this anxiety in her resistance to categorisation as well as her illegitimacy and ambivalence, proving herself capable of more agency (sexual and otherwise) than her courtly love roots might indicate.

There is opportunity for further research into the representation of female roles in different genres, expanding beyond my analysis of the ‘mistress’ in courtly love literature and her transformation on stage. Specific research into French literature, for instance, may provide further etymological study of the ‘mistress’ as both a linguistic and literary concept than is possible for me to include in this study. Moreover, there is scope for international research regarding representations of and the reality of sexually active women in French courts. I also suggest that further analysis of the conflicting use of ‘mistress’ in theatrical depictions of female rulers could provide insight into the perception of legitimate female rule and its relationship with unconventional sexual behaviour, while also developing our understanding of the etymological evolution in specific terms like ‘mistress’ which can simultaneously denote a ruler and an extra-marital sexual partner. One could extend this analysis into both theatrical and historical conceptions of women in power who have absorbed the masculinity of leadership legitimately and then indulged in extra-marital liaisons, engaging further with discourses of favouritism and effeminizing tyranny.

When Donne declared ‘mistress’ to be an alternative term for ‘concubine’, he was articulating the ideological view that all women who operate sexually outside the confines of marriage are alike. This thesis analyses the fallacy in his thinking; moreover, it illustrates how the theatre challenged this notion from the late sixteenth century onwards with its consistent efforts to create a specific character that occupies the social and cultural space of the ‘mistress’ in its modern meaning. By creating this character of the ‘modern mistress’ performatively, the playwrights established a new understanding of female sexual behaviour that would not only thrive on stage but extend to the wider early modern community. Despite the best efforts of moralists, this new breed of ‘mistress’ was here to stay.

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